

# JEEVADHARA

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

LIBERATION, A RED-HOT ISSUE

SNAP EVERY YOKE

*Jeanne Devos*

WE WORK HARD ALL NIGHT LONG AND CATCH NOTHING

*Alice Lukose*

TOWARDS AN INDIAN THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION

*Indian Theological Association*

STATEMENT

*Conference of Religious India*

A BRIEF MEDITATION ON THE CRI 1986 STATEMENT  
ON COMMITMENT TO LIBERATION

*Samuel Rayan*

SOME REFLECTIONS 'ON CHRISTIAN FREEDOM  
AND LIBERATION'

Property of  
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## JEEVADHARA

# The Living Christ

LIBERATION, A RED-HOT ISSUE

Editor

SAMUEL RAYAN

Jeevadhara  
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## Editorial

Liberation is today the most seriously and hotly discussed issue throughout the Third World churches and countries where the vast majority of people are poor, oppressed and dehumanized. A new theology in place of the old has been taking shape there and is being shaped not out of class-room discussions, but out of an experience of God who is encountered in the poor, or rather, out of the people's experience of poverty, oppression and injustice and their experience of God who is calling and enabling them to liberate themselves.

The First World countries, if not also the churches as well as those elsewhere who ideologically and economically depend on them, suspect danger in the awakening of the Third World and especially in its new theology. Their suspicion is not ill-founded. There have been times when feudalism and imperialism both in the World and in the churches misused theology and exegesis to their advantage. The new theology which is called 'theology of liberation' attempts to make a clear sweep of all such 'misappropriations'. Its new hermeneutics strictly based on history would not brook double interpretations, one favouring the rich and the powerful, and the other applicable to the poor and the powerless so as to have the status quo maintained. It is no wonder then that liberation theology was looked upon with distrust and hatred. As soon as an *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation* was published by Rome, though it was not a condemnation at all, but it even conveyed a promise of another document on the positive values of liberation theology, vested interests, including certain priests and bishops, at least in this part of the world, gave such undue importance and publicity to it that it looked as if it were an outright condemnation of

liberation theology. The stark silence of these very people over the second *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation* is quite revealing.

The peculiarity of this issue of *Jeevadhara* is that all the contributions therein explicitly converge on the important theme of 'Liberation' in its negative as well as positive aspects. The article of Jeanne Devos titled "Snap Every Yoke" treats of the liberation of poor girls, domestic workers and migrant women going from rural areas to the Indian cities. It has the rare savour of personal encounter and suffering with them for their betterment. Alice Lukose's article, dealing with the liberation of the fisher people in Kerala is in the same strain and has the same savour. There are two Statements in this issue, one made by the Indian Theological Association (ITA) at its annual meeting in Poonamallee, Madras on December 28-31, 1985. It is long enough to speak for itself and evinces a certain disillusionment among Indian theologians and the direction in which they are moving. The second Statement is that of the Conference of Religious India (CRI) at its national assembly 1986. It is a terse one to which Samuel Rayan has added a brief meditation. He has all but praise for it as it is, surprisingly enough, a radical step taken by the Major Superiors of Religious in India, inspite of discordant notes sounded by some of the bishops present at the assembly. Lastly there follows a major study, by Samuel Rayan, of the new Vatican document on *Christian Freedom and Liberation*. Unfortunately, for want of space and time, we could not publish it in full, certain passages here and there from part II onwards had to be omitted and we are sorry for it. But we hope its continuity and main thrust and arguments have not been impaired.

General Editor

## Snap Every Yoke

### 1. Knots of the yoke

Reflecting on Isaiah 58 could be a way of sharing with you some of the realities I have seen and heard in the past months. It could be a way of giving expression to what I have learnt from poor girls, domestic workers and migrant women, coming from rural areas and living in our cities. Isaiah 58 could be a channel for communicating the hope that lives in the heart of these simple people. The Word of the Lord came to Isaiah. The Lord said:

Is not this what I require from you...  
to loose the fetters of injustice,  
to untie the knots of the yoke,  
to snap every yoke  
and set free those who have been crushed?

They come forced by hunger. They come in search of a job. Sometimes they decide for themselves; sometimes they are encouraged or prodded by others. Some are sent by religious people, others are brought by merchants who have bought them with a view to profit. There are tens of thousands of them; girls and women. They have no proper name. They are 'the girl(s)', or 'the maid(s)', or 'the servant(s)', or 'the prostitutes'... Because of their poverty, hunger and dependency, they get further fettered in our cities and tied up in the knots of the yoke.

And yet they do have names of their own. And their own stories. Beautiful stories, and stories sorrowful, pitiful and heart-rending. With what little is left in us of our humanity we must listen to them.

Valeria: I left my tribal village 14 years ago. Now I am 31. A priest helped me to come to Bombay; to work so that I could help my sister and brother to study. Both

are married now. Rs. 80/- I have been earning every month, I send to my parents. Now it is too late for me to marry. Nobody cares. I shall be an aayah for life.

Girija: I only ask you not to do to any other girl what they did to me, leave me in a strange family to work... It is terrible.

Selvarani: I am 11 years old. A sister came to my village. The parish priest called us to go to Bombay. He said it would be better for us. We were 50 girls from our area; now I do not know where the others are. I speak Tamil and know Kannada, but no one speaks that here. I do not know how to write...

Selvi: Now my husband refuses to come to church marriage. I was not yet 14 when we got married before the elders. The priest could not bless a marriage at this age. Now the priest cannot baptize my children. (Tears rolled down Selvi's cheeks.) I stay with my parents. They say I give them trouble. They are ashamed of me...but I need some help for my children. I am working in two houses and get Rs 50 and Rs 30. Sometimes I have to work very late, and I cannot look after my children, and my father scolds me. The money is not enough for me and the children. So the eldest who is four years old goes begging...

Gulsa: The days are so long...I am tired. I have to get up at 5 a.m. and start cooking. In the evening the parties never end...I have to clean up before going to sleep, and that is seldom before midnight.

Sangeetha: I have to sit on the doorstep and go to sleep without food if the cooking is not the way they like it. I was for eight months in another house; there the master's son, a big boy, would not let me sleep.

Malathi: I am 13 years and stay in the Indiara Nagar slum. I am the only earning member of my family. My mother is weak; my father is a TB patient; he drinks. Gopal, my brother, has polio. I work for him, he is my brother.

Juliana: Every evening at 5 p.m. I go to school. On Saturday afternoon we have our meeting. We are a group of seven. I feel at home there. It looks as if we all have the same problems, and if one suffers, we all suffer. I have been getting beaten, but now I have a place to go.

Raksha: Every time the man of the house is angry he beats me on the head. Often I bleed from my nose but no one dares to help me.

I feel deep pain as I listen to the story of many domestic workers. I feel loneliness, expectations, hopes. The place of their humiliation and suffering includes "good" catholic families who "practise their religion". They include church institutions as well, and convents of religious. Once upon a time the slaves sang: "Nobody knows the trouble I have seen."

"There is ample evidence that domestic workers are living in situations of social and economic exploitation, which deny them freedom and human dignity for their growth as persons." (Tony Charanghat, *The Examiner*, 22 March, 1986)

Their working hours are long, their remuneration small. A pittance is given to them as a charity. It is given out of the patron's good-will, generosity and piety. There is no work contract. The women and girls have no leave, no organization or union, no legal protection whatever. They live, are forced to live, in the house of the employer. This adds to their dependency and insecurity. They live in fear of being thrown out, with nowhere to go, in fear of punishment, of ill treatment and humiliation and of sexual harassment. In all the cities of our country thousands of women, girls and children live and work in inhuman and oppressive situations. Bombay alone has more than 70,000 migrant female domestic workers and 120,000 brothel girls. Most of them have been forced into this situation by poverty and dependency. Most of them are illiterate. Coming into the cities, they are uprooted from their culture and customs, and are soon alienated from their family, community and language.

## 2. Discrimination

Not only do the domestic workers suffer crushing injustice as workers, but they live with day-to-day discrimination. The discrimination of caste, sex and class which rule society is experienced by them in a person-to-person relationship within the family where they have to live. Living-in as working girl or "servant" makes them "homeless" within a "home". They experience a painful violation of their personal dignity and human rights.

Every one gets a silver tumbler, mine is an aluminium one. It has to be kept and washed separately — Manju.  
I have to cook separate rice for the dog and me — Tamilarasy.

When they go for parties I have to go along to look after the baby. They often ask their hosts, 'Can we bring the girl in', — 'the girl' that is me... — Arul.

The teenagers in the family blame me for what they broke. They are always and everywhere right, I never and nowhere. I am always questioned, they never — Latha.

Is there any among the domestic workers and among the poorest people, who has not experienced others' "distrust" of them? Which poor girl or woman has not been accused of deceit? and which child not charged with lying?

In the house... I better do not say anything — Roda.  
Can you hear the silent pain of an unheard young person?  
It must be noted that a young person who is not taken seriously will find it more and more difficult to speak properly and will lose the habit of speaking?

I have to wait for food till it is all cold, and often old. I have to wait to see the TV till the cleaning is over and the programme too. I have to wait to sleep till the party is over. I have to wait... — Rajeswari.

The poor must always and everywhere wait. The higher you climb the social ladder the less you have to wait. Everything will have its time, and will have to be punctual. It is the culture of the well-to-do classes.

I am not allowed to go to church, and I may not speak to anyone in my neighbourhood, says Bai — Rita.

Though Julie was given food, accommodation, and old clothes now and then, she had absolutely no pocket-money of her own. When she asks her employer for permission to leave for a better job, she is refused. Julie is forced to continue at a job which is beginning to stifle her. Nor can she go home, for her family will not tolerate it. — D.W.

This sense of ownership is a very typical reaction of fear among employers of losing a docile girl. Such cases of "possession" are not uncommon.

Of the domestic workers one third are children below 14 years. They are deprived of their home, their childhood, and of the affection and freedom necessary for their growth and development. Children in domestic work suffer from silent violence. We know the crying deprivation of children who are not able, or not allowed, to play or laugh. We know how they get cramped and stunted inside when they are frustrated wholly and for long in their desire to have their friends, to wear beautiful clothes as the children of the family do, to go to school with them and wear the school uniform...

### 3. Untie the knots

Yahweh's words keep haunting and challenging. They can heal us and give us life if only we hear and heed them. They command us

"to untie the knots of the yoke,  
to snap every yoke,  
and set free those who have been crushed.  
If you take away from the midst of you the yoke,  
the pointing of the finger,  
and share the desire of the afflicted,  
then shall your light break the darkness." Is. 58

Domestic workers being isolated and alienated are seldom in the struggle for liberation. They are too much alone to

fight, too tired, too poor, too crushed, too alienated. Ignorance, fear and the threat of starvation are more overwhelming than the outcry against injustice, and so they remain silent. They are waiting for some-one to enter into a relationship of mutual trust with them, to walk with them, and reveal to them their dignity and their hidden possibilities.

Who today have the eye and the sensitivity to notice that the domestic workers, in families or convents, "have no wine"? They have no wine; they have not experienced the happiness of simple everyday life. Life is denied them. In Cana the water for everyday use became the wine of joy and celebration. In the case of these poor women the simple and clear water of life is lacking. Were it there it could be touched and transformed. It is the task of Jesus' followers to make sure that the jars are filled with water, and authentic human existence is made possible for these women and girls and children and all the people. In Cana it was a woman that saw that they had no wine. Today would it also be the woman or the feminine in each person who will see the need and move to meet it?

The urgent need of the moment is two-fold: (i) to create an awareness in the public in general and the hearts of employers in particular that domestics are human persons with their own dignity, needs and problems, and not tools to be used at will; (ii) to enable domestic workers themselves to a fresh sense of their own dignity, rights and duties (cf T. Charanhat, in *The Examiner*, 22 March, 1986). The various recommendations made in *The Examiner* are a sign of hope: education and conscientization of all — young and old, employer and employed — in right attitudes to manual labour, dignity of work, the rights of persons; implementation of social and legal measures; drawing up of a Code of Behaviour obligatory on all Christians; stipulation of wage scales and service conditions; creation of reconciliation panels to settle grievances; helping workers to organize themselves; training programmes, job-skills and social education for the workers;

facilities for socializing, relaxation, counselling etc. "In order that the shackles of exploitation be broken, all those who care about human dignity and human rights should adopt a concerted plan of action to lessen the problems of this vulnerable section of society... One need not belabour the point that the Church must come out strongly for the weaker section of the employed..." (Ibid)

Pope John Paul II also had a strong message for the christian community and for India. Speaking in Ranchi last February he said:

"The basis for determining the value of human work is not primarily the kind of work being done but the fact that the one who is doing it is a person (*Laborem Exercens* 6). It follows from this that all human work, however humble it may appear, must be fully respected, protected, and justly remunerated so that families, and indeed the whole community, may live in peace, prosperity and progress."

New life and a fuller life for domestic workers is being opened up already where their isolation is broken through different initiatives such as recreations and get-togethers, harvest feasts and festivals. Educational facilities are made more and more available. It is important to keep the workers informed of them. In the major cities like Bombay, Delhi, Madras and Calcutta evening schools and open classes have started in addition to different forms of non-formal education and training in job-skills. In some villages a preparation course and registration are made available to girls and women before they leave for work in the cities. To ensure basic justice and fair work conditions for domestics, employment organisations have come into being. Commendable work is being done in this line by several religious congregations like the Religious of Mary Immaculate in Delhi and Bombay, Sisters of St Charles Borromeo, Sisters of St Joseph of Cluny, Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, and others. They safeguard the rights of girls and women. Theirs is a prophetic action.

Their work is simple and clear. They accommodate at their place or convent the girls and the women on their arrival in the city. A preliminary course of fifteen days' duration is arranged to initiate the girls into the work they are likely to get. The workers are enabled to make themselves familiar with their rights and with a code of conduct. The sisters then arrange their placement with families who agree to abide by the conditions of employment as laid down by the organisers. The conditions include the following among others: in case of illness adequate medical care shall be provided till the worker recovers completely. Basic salaries are settled with Rs 350 to start with, besides board and lodging. Monthly and yearly leave is provided for: a domestic worker is entitled to 15 days' annual leave with pay and one way rail fare to her native place or home if she has worked for 10 months in the same family.

Within church institutions, too, strong and clear initiatives are taken. The awakening began years ago, though the progress has been laborious and slow.

"As part of her effort at renewal, the church wants to interpret and spell out her social doctrine in terms adapted to Indian situations and understandable to the workers. The church commits herself to translate this doctrine into concrete actions, first of all amongst her own members and in her own institutions, and also to promote this ideology as a dynamic leaven in the struggle of the workers for social justice..." (Church in India Today, 1969)

"The Church will have to set an example for justice by setting out terms and conditions that are human, and by establishing channels of communication." (Personnel in Church-related Institutions)

An up-to-date concretisation of this is surely the "Jesuit Madurai Province Domestic Employees Regulations 1985" and the courage to implement it.

"We shall overcome any obstacles that may come in the way of implementation of this regulation in a

spirit of generosity and trust." (Madurai Jesuit Province)

The Archbishop of Bombay has given clear directives to all the parishes, religious houses and institutions in the diocese. And he means business. He demands:

"In order to see that these norms are fulfilled in the interests of our employees, I should like to have from you a compliance letter indicating that you have complied with the requirements." (Circular AH, C:41)

Domestic workers who live-in must be brought out of their isolation in the home of the employer. They must be enabled to rebuild their damaged and impoverished self-image and their confidence in themselves. There is need to enable them to organize themselves into a movement of solidarity, and to develop their own leadership. They will thus come to affirm themselves, assert their rights, resolve their own problems, and participate actively and vocally in the life of the locality to which they make so vital a contribution. All over the country small groups of domestic workers are beginning to discover one another, to share in each other's joy and pain, and above all to do things for one another and together. Special attention is being given to "child workers". Work hours for children employed in domestic work should not be more than four a day; so the child can go to evening school, and can regularly meet and play with other children. Through articles in papers and women's magazines, public opinion and the image — some would say the 'stigma' — of domestic workers is slowly changing. Other worker unions are starting to come forward pledging support for the rights of domestic workers. Beginnings are made also for basic laws for domestic workers. Movements of domestic workers are initiated and supported by the Commission on Justice, Development and Peace of the Catholic Bishops Conference, India.

We believe in the vitality and wisdom of domestic workers. They have their own strategies, not only for survival but for improving their conditions of life and work, and for growing together towards the fulness of their humanity.

#### 4. Idle talk

Isaiah comes in again with the word of the Lord sharp as a sword, searching out the dispositions of our inmost spirit, and judging and saving.

If you honour it, not going your own ways,  
or seeking your own pleasure,  
or talking idly,  
then you shall take delight in the Lord. Is:58

Many people will find the change hard. It will take them considerable effort to see in the poor, illiterate girl cooking, washing and cleaning, a person equal to themselves in human dignity and rights, a person with her own thoughts and free decisions, one to be treated with reverence. It is important to look at things from the side of the workers themselves. It is important to place the whole question in the context of Christian living. The norms proposed are asking for basic justice only. Anything less would be criminal injustice. But they disclose fundamental Christian truth about human beings, and demand profound change in our value system and our attitude to people. They expose the falseness of the 'charity' which forgets to attend in the first place to the requirements of justice. Talk or love which bypasses justice is idle talk.

All who are in one way or other committed to the poor will continuously meet people who wish things to remain the way they are, and justify it. A letter to the Editor of *The Examiner* concludes: "However, till such time as job-skills are imparted and acquired by the domestic workers, they would be wise to content themselves with half a loaf of bread which is the maximum adopted by 90 percent of their fellow brethren from the lower income rungs in our country." (S.G.P. Athaide, *The Examiner*, April 12, 1986)

Many feel threatened by domestic workers coming together. "They will hear too much." "You will spoil those girls who have so far been 'so good' to us." In story after story the Fourth Gospel assures us that, by following Jesus, life will be new and full. But it also shows us through the same stories that the privileged and the

powerful will not understand. "You have kept the best wine till the end?" "Can a man re-enter his mother's womb and be born again?" "Is this really your son and was he really born blind?" Today they would ask: Who told these girls to be so bold and free and to make demands? Dorothee Soelle observes that "the wealth of the wealthy lies not only in their possessions, but in their power to dominate the life of others."

When we pinpoint concretely the things that cause tears and pain the girls and the women, we are reminded of 'how lazy' the girls are, and of 'the trouble they give'. It is indeed easier to listen to sufferings outside, far away, in the jungle, than to look at the problem of injustice in our own homes, families and institutions. But prophetic denunciation is also called for in our own houses and homes. There too efforts must be made to transform human relationships; and secure greater and fairer participation.

History repeats itself also in our own lives. It is not easy to agree to the liberation of domestic workers whom we need so much as it was not easy for Pharaoh to agree to the liberation of the Hebrew slaves. The danger is not that we say No, but that we have become insensitive to the needs of persons other than ourselves. We hide behind excuses, we lay claim to charity, we deceive ourselves, "talking idly".

"We have no money", while there is plenty for 'own pleasures'.

"They have hardly any work to do", only cooking, washing, cleaning, caring, for ten, twelve, eighteen hours a day. "These girls should be grateful, they had nothing...", as if we are justified in exploiting and using the victims of an already unjust and criminal situation of poverty.

"I have a little girl to do the house chores. She is grateful for the pocket money she earns. Poor kid, she would otherwise be starving." But to take advantage of starvation, and misinterpret forced silence is nothing short of blatant and unscrupulous exploitation.

'I treat her as my own daughter.' That is said as long as it is a matter of paying wages. once the moment for marriage comes with its expenses, the girl is suddenly no longer 'daughter'; she is sent back home without further ado, without any savings.

Folks living in security untouched by want and others who are honest but uninformed do not know and do not want to recognize the pain and bitterness of girls and women who are slighted, treated casually, deprived, oppressed, used, and discarded. Only when we no longer feel threatened and do not escape into specious legitimations, can we be liberated and saved by simple people like domestic workers. 'Water' shall become 'wine' in our day-to-day life and relationships if we do what He tells us, if we ask for life, and hear others ask for life, and concern ourselves with what they lack and what they are deprived of.

## 5. Grow healthy

Then shall your light break forth  
like the dawn and soon

you will grow healthy like a wound newly healed. Is. 58  
All over the country the number of persons joining the struggle of domestic workers is on the increase. We read of them in *The Examiner*, *The New Leader* etc... Having met and learned from Sangeetha, Ismat, Arul and many others, I am not prepared to come to terms with the injustice, discrimination and destruction of life inflicted upon so many of our girls and women. For long I have laid the problem aside, pleading my inadequacy: 'I cannot do anything.' Contact with domestic workers have laid bare to me my own strong desire for security and protection. It has led me to see how little I still know of the world of the very poor. That world still confuses me. Working with these women tears apart the absolute security of religious life; it cuts through the popular acceptance of the middle class where I belong; and it calls in question the certainties of a tested and proven model of life and pattern of relationship.

Often I reflect on how much we have in common, these women and I. I too am diffident to speak in a group; I too have long-buried memories... These working women have revealed to me my own hidden desire for acceptance. They have laid bare my tendency to escape into theories and academic knowledge, and my secret craving to seek popularity with my peer group, and my concern to keep my time well scheduled for my own plans. Working with them has created in me and others a tension, a 'saving tension', a re-discovery of life-struggles, the struggle for life, for fulness of life.

I experience God in the grandeur and beauty of creation, in the silence of meditation, in the wisdom of theologians and scientists. I experience him alive in small groups of domestic workers where the knots of loneliness break. Being together with them is a celebration, a sharing of laughter, talk, pain, brokenness and helplessness. A celebration of one another and of being together; as a wound newly healed. And the wonder of it all is that it is so simple: six jars of water, one for each working day, a jar of water for washing, cleaning, cooking! And it will become wine if... Sharing with them I experience them as gift. They change us. They make us aware of what goes on. They evangelize us.

## 6. Making bones strong

And the Lord will guide you continually  
and satisfy your desire with good things  
and make your bones strong;  
and you shall be like a watered garden,  
like a spring of water  
whose waters fail not.

You shall be called Rebuilder of broken walls,  
Restorer of houses in ruins. Is. 58

The greatest hope for domestic workers is alive in their own small groups, in their solidarity with one another, in their clarity of spirit and feeling for each other, within their own decisions and their own movement. Their simple

actions performed together remind me of David, David with no weapons in his hand, but also without fear of Goliath. I believe God will here and now do what he did in times past. Of course, the sight of the gigantic forces to overcome makes me apprehensive. At the start it always looks as if God is making a mistake. He seems to be blind in his preference for small people. His saving work continues today. "He saw us dancing before we knew we could move."

The movement of small groups carries its own contribution for the freedom of domestic workers. Life grows in their sharing, as it did in the sharing of loaves and fishes in the desert. Together we live justice a bit more; and move closer to the community in which we need no longer dominate nor be deprived, but serve one another in joy. I know the feast is not ended; it has only begun. And the best wine need not be the sweetest.

But "God considered this hope and this demand for justice so ineradicable that he identified himself with the oppressed. In their faces we find the face of God. If we want to serve the true God rather than some idol — whether the idol be pleasure, wealth, self-assertion, religion or even our own version of ethical purity — then we must break out of the circle of self-absorption and pay heed to the bloodied face of our fellow human beings" (Leonardo Boff, *Way of the Cross — Way of Justice*).

When people get a chance to live, when small and simple people get their rights, then God becomes beautiful and strong and fully our God.

Then you shall call, and  
the Lord will answer  
and he will say  
HERE I AM. Is. 58

# Towards an Indian Theology of Liberation\*

## Introduction

1. This is a statement of the Indian Theological Association which met for its 9th annual gathering at the Sacred Heart Seminary, Poonamallee, Madras from December 28-31, 1985. Out of one hundred and forty members more than seventy were present. Most of the participants were priest theologians. We regret very few women and only a few lay people were present. We are addressing this statement to you, our friends in India and the world over, engaged in the struggle for the poor and the oppressed whose concerns we share and to all those who believe in the Divine as an ally of life and freedom. Our search and exchange these days have centred around the theme, "Indian Theology of Liberation". We have struggled together for authenticity and clarity. We prayed and shared the Eucharist in common and in groups. We moved towards a deeper understanding of one another, of the oppressive situation in which millions of our people are forced to live, of the historical demands of our humanity and of our faith, as well as of our failures as Christian thinkers. We are grateful to God for the experience of these days, and thankful to one another. And we ask for the grace of fuller conversion to the poor, to the cause of their liberation, and to genuine human existence.

2. Liberation struggles and freedom movements have become intense and world-wide. They are the oppressed people's response to systems, principalities and powers which despoil, dehumanise and kill. They strike at struc-

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\* Statement of the Indian Theological Association at its 9th Annual Meeting on December 28-31, 1985 at Poonamallee, Madras.

tured domination; they seek to subvert established mechanisms of oppression, and set the down-trodden free. The struggles and movements are found to be living and functioning at various levels of reality. They range from a new socio-political consciousness kindled in the body of the poor; through hunger for justice burning, like the bush on the Sinai, in the hearts of the young and the old alike, in our villages and slums, to the committed action of organized groups who dissent, resist, fight, and pay the price; and on to full-scale revolutions as have been carried out in China, for instance, or Cuba, or Zimbabwe. It is calculated that in India there are thousands of activist groups of which a great number include in their ideology and programme people's organization and struggle for liberation.

3. Liberation struggles and freedom movements are not new. Nor is theological reflection on them without precedent. The exodus is a classical case in point. But it is in recent decades that various deeply oppressed sectors of human kind have started to read history and religion critically from their own predicament, to re-read them in their wounds and the death of their children, and to elaborate a body of theological thought, reflections on their oppressed condition and on their faith by making the two interact critically and creatively. The result has been the emergence of theologies of liberation, each with a different experience of oppression as its focus. Thus the focus of Black Theology of Liberation in the US is racist oppression; in Latin America it is economic and political oppression; in the Eastern European countries it is ideological and political oppression; among North Atlantic women the centre of concern is erotic or sexist oppression born of patriarchy, while Africa's preoccupation centres on cultural oppression. In Asia, articulate theologies of liberation have sprung from people's liberative praxis in South Korea and the Philippines.

4. The foci may differ. But the approach of nearly all the branches of Theology of Liberation on all the continents is identical though in each case it has been

independent in its origins. All start from below; all start from experience of oppression; all start from commitment to a new, non-oppressive, equal social order and from within involvement in liberational struggles. It is from there that they analyse social realities, re-read the Bible, re-express their faith, and reconceive theology as a service to liberational combat and to the creation of a new earth.

5. These movements have made the name Theology of Liberation familiar in the theological world of modern times; not only familiar, but also challenging and controversial. We are thankful to the people whose thought and struggle have given us the name. But we know, as well as they, that no authentic theology can be an import or export commodity. Authentic theology must be conceived in relation to the oppressed and brought forth in the common political travail of each people, in each concrete historical context. What is our condition and context? What kind of oppression have we, Indian theologians, become aware of? How profound and complete is our analysis of it? What tools are we using to understand it? In what struggles are we participating? At what cost and risk to ourselves? And where lies our approach road?

## I. The Indian Situation

6. The foremost feature of the Indian situation is the staggering inequalities caused by the present pattern of development. This situation is well known and does not need any elaboration. It suffices to mention a few facts. We live in a country where caste and class coincide, assets and income are monopolised by a few persons from the upper castes and classes, who hold economic, social, political and cultural power. The top ten percent own over seventy percent of the assets while the share of the lowest twenty percent is less than two percent. The latter belong primarily to the scheduled caste and scheduled tribes. While the situation of the upper classes and castes improves and they control most political offices, financial institutions and high status jobs, the state of the scheduled caste and scheduled tribes and women from the weaker sections de-

teriorates. Children are denied the right to proper growth. There are an estimated 45 million child labourers in India.

7. This division of society into the powerful and the powerless is given a religious legitimization in the name of the caste system. We find ourselves in a male-dominated society in which women are treated as property. Even while being shocked at atrocities on the scheduled castes and at dowry-deaths, very few make any attempt to get away from the caste and male domination attitudes that ultimately give rise to these atrocities. We saw these inequalities reflected in all areas such as literacy, infant mortality, malnutrition, bondage and lack of access to any facilities. These inequalities accumulate as one goes down the ladder of urban, rural, class, caste and sex differences with the rural scheduled caste women being the most exploited.

8. We are equally conscious of the struggle of many groups against this unjust system of inequalities and exploitation. We are aware of movements for upward mobility as, for example, among the Ezhavas. We also know of dalits awakening to the fact that they are deprived of their right even to basic necessities like their right to draw water from the village well. Many of them have started demanding their right to be human. We know about the tribals revolting against deforestation and destruction of the forests which are their life system. We are aware of women's movements, the struggles of fisherfolks, of the landless agricultural labourers, other unorganized sections and various forms of political awakening among the marginalized groups.

9. We are also aware of the resistance from the dominant sections to any change among the weaker sections. The people who struggle are suppressed in the name of national security. Laws such as the National Security Act (1984), Essential Services Maintenance Act (1984) and the Anti-Terrorist Act (1985) are used even to eliminate them physically. The dominant sections often give a communal turn to these struggles in order to get the support of the masses against the activists. Activists are called missionaries

or atheists and efforts are made to turn the masses against them. This has to be viewed particularly in the context of fundamentalist revival among Hindus, Muslims and other religious groups and tension amidst various communities. The leaders instigate the masses against the activists in the name of religion and it is the common people who suffer the most during communal riots and other forms of victimisation that follow.

10. It is in this context that we reflected on our role as theologians. We are fully aware that theology of all faiths has, oftener than not, given religious legitimization to inequalities and oppression. In India it has been done in the name of *varna*, *dharma* and *karma*, and other religions have used different frameworks. But very rarely has theology identified the protest and prophetic elements in every religion, in order to complement and support the liberative struggle, going on in our society. In fact, theology has often deflected attempts at reform, by finding new legitimization for inequalities.

11. Hence we feel encouraged by the beginning of an awakening among many Christians. It is heartening to see many Christian women and men, priests and religious join various other groups which are trying to change the system in favour of the poor. Many of them have thus become part of people's struggles. This motivates us to make an effort to theologise on this oppressive Indian situation and identify ways of supporting the marginalized sections that are demanding their right to be human.

## **II. The Role of the Indian Church in the Liberative Movements**

### i) The ideal of an ecclesial community

12. *The Acts of the Apostles* presents the Church as a community that continues the prophetic mission of Jesus Christ (2:17-18). This prophetic spirit was operative first with the Church liberating it from the narrow socio-religious framework of the Jewish community and turned

it into a powerful leaven of transformation of society in the world. The power of the Spirit that animated it, enabled it to challenge the existing value systems, even though it was a minority. Its identity was that of a community, based on sharing, and active in service.

13. From the beginning the Apostles presented to the Christians, the ideal of a community, built on authentic human relationship, as the only means of relating to the divine, and building a Church working for the total liberation of human being. Though the first Christians did not come up to this ideal, the Apostles continued to challenge them to live up to it. We too find ourselves facing the same challenge in the Indian situation today.

## **ii) Existing contradictions**

14. However, Church in India presents a picture of contradictions, as far as the liberation of the oppressed is concerned. From the very beginning the Church projected the image of an institutional religion, concerned about its own ideologies and interests, instead of being a leaven that transforms society. It never effectively questioned the sinful structures of Indian society, such as discriminate caste system and unequal economic order. Rather, many sections of the Church took pride in allying themselves with the higher castes and the politically and economically powerful.

15. In the recent past a large number of people have become Christians, in search of liberation from the caste system; however, they were not allowed to free themselves from caste oppressions, because the Church, in most parts of India, was, and is still controlled, by the upper class and upper caste elements that continue to treat them as new Christians and untouchables. Even within its own internal organization, it maintains these inhuman structures, which divided the community into castes and social classes.

16. These contradictions continue even today. We find several Christians actively involved in the struggles of

marginalized groups, such as the fisherfolk, tribals and women belonging to the weaker sections; but they receive very little support from the christian community as a whole. By and large, the community seems to be conditioned by a service mentality.

17. Because of the pressure of the dominant sections within the Church, the survival mentality and the minority complex, the Church in India tends to become more and more institution-oriented. The power wielding sections which control the church, also get the benefits of these institutions and develop a vested interest in their maintenance. This stifles the prophetic spirit within the Church, making the gifts of the Spirit become ineffective, and hampering the efforts of the marginalised sections, to build a just society.

18. This opposition of the dominant sections is further strengthened by the mentality of the hierarchy which tests authenticity more by conformity to an orthodox teaching than by readiness to get involved in the struggles of the poor, where the living Christ is present.

19. Guided by the traditional theology of mission the Church continues to view evangelisation with its stress on numerical increase and institutional growth. Consequently its mission to transform the world in the prophetic spirit of Jesus seems to suffer (Lk 4:18).

20. This movement towards a new society essentially involves a readiness to live with a situation of on-going conflict and pluralism. But the institutional and dogmatic mentality of Church leadership does not seem to tolerate pluralism, be it in its theology, way of living or worship. This diverts the attention of the Christian community from major issues of socio-economic inequality and polarises them around marginal issues. The creative energy of the community is drained away and Christians are prevented from making any significant contribution to social change.

21. The Church must liberate itself from the mentality

which negates experiences other than the Greco-Roman, and must establish complete equality of Rites, though in the end all imported Rites must give way to genuinely indigenous forms of ecclesial expressions.

### iii) Liberative efforts in the past and present

22. However, we do not mean that the Indian Church has never been involved in socio-economic or political issues. We Christians were not fully aware of the oppressive structures that dominated the socio-economic scene and often this involvement took the forms of relief and charitable works, viewed as an evangelical action. We really regret Church's undue dependence on foreign money and call for a more conscientious use of funds raised from abroad and our own country.

23. We also see signs of uneasiness felt by the Church leaders about the unjust economic structures. They have made many statements calling upon Christians to work for a new society; but unfortunately, on the plane of implementation, they have been ineffective, because they lacked courage to liberate themselves from dominant sections and vested interests.

24. The major constraint to implementation has been the Church's cultural alienation, and undue subservience to external authority. Another very important reason as to why the Church leaders hesitated to support struggle for change, was their undue fear of Marxism, though as a matter of strategy, they have at times allied themselves with the Marxist parties. Due to this fear complex with regard to Marxism, the dominant sections, who advised the leaders, and have vested interests in the maintenance of the status quo, presented people's struggles as Marxist and atheistic, thus ensuring the perpetuation of their own domination.

25. Also the formation of the priests often becomes a tool of alienation, rather than preparation for involvement in the struggles of the people. Their life-style and

the type of theology they learn result in a value system, meant more for security than for risk-taking, which would be the mentality needed for those who should get involved in a struggle.

#### iv) Hope for the future

26. However, we are convinced that today in spite of these obstacles, there is still vitality in the Indian church. We hear many voices of protest, and we see many women and men getting involved in the life and struggle of the marginalized sections. This gives us hope and this hope can become a source of new life if the whole Christian community including its leaders listen to the prophetic cries. We feel, therefore, that we should support any move towards dialogue between the activists and various sections of the Christian community no matter who takes initiative in this direction.

27. We, as theologians, have an important role to play in understanding the signs of the times in a spirit of faith (GS 4) and to theologise, supporting these struggles. An authentic Indian liberation theology can emerge only when those who teach theology and those engaged in the training of future priests and religious, participate in and support these struggles.

28. The creation of basic community action groups that are guided by the power of the Spirit in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed can promote the growth of such a theology. These communities should serve as catalysts in the society for social change, and in this process they should collaborate with men and women of other faiths. This will demand a genuine process of inculturation, which, in this context of liberation theology, is to be understood as revalorisation and acceptance in our lives of popular religiosity and culture of the tribals, scheduled castes and other oppressed sections of the people.

### **III. Search for an Ideological Framework**

29. In history, the liberation of the oppressed classes, castes, minority groups has always been the outcome of a

collective action. But collective action for liberation requires an ideology, that is, an explanation of oppressive mechanisms at work in society and a *liberation project* which includes clear goals and the means to attain them.

### i) Marxian vision

30. Among the ideologies which have attempted to fulfil this function in the world today the most powerful one is perhaps Marxism. In the course of this century, and within a span of 60 years, more than one third of the earth's population has come under its sway: Russia and the whole of Eastern Europe, China, Vietnam, Kampuchia, Ethiopia and a few others.

31. Marxism as an ideology, not only shapes the actual destiny of hundreds of millions within those countries, but appeals to many more millions who hope in their turn to achieve their liberation.

Some of the reasons for this appeal of Marxism, chiefly in the underdeveloped countries are: (i) it provides a scientific understanding of the mechanisms of oppression at the world, national and local levels; (ii) it offers a vision of a new world to be built up as a socialistic society, first stage towards a classless society, where genuine brotherhood may become hopefully possible, and for which it is worth sacrificing everything.

32. Marx offers an explanation for this situation: exploitation of labour, alienation of native wealth by colonial powers, a political machinery controlled by the capitalists, the religious, cultural and social patterns favourable to the economically powerful groups. This analysis has contributed to the understanding of culture and religion.

33. Marxism offers a world view where man collectively and in history, appropriates his essence through labour and moves to greater self fulfilment in relation of brotherhood with others. Because of this vision, a theologian must be open to it and ask himself whether the tools of social analysis as offered by Marx are or not helpful to him.

34. In practice, Marxism has not stood up to the high vision it offers. There are many reasons for it. Some pertain to the corrosive pressure of world capitalism; other reasons are internal to the socialist societies themselves, and the means of liberation they used, such as, the use of political purge, the formation of new and oppressive bureaucratic classes.

35. We believe however that in the common task of liberation of the exploited, Marxists and Christians can help one another and cooperate in the process of becoming a more human and a more efficient instrument of liberation.

## ii) **Gandhian vision**

36. As against the Marxian idea of class war, and violence which would characterise class war, India's own freedom struggle offers an alternative which we cannot overlook in our search for an ideological framework for liberation theology.

37. Though the integral liberation which Gandhi envisaged for India is not realized, the method of liberation which he evolved remains a potent and comprehensive but unexploited resource.

38. That method is a praxis which first of all recognizes the fact of all being locked in a situation of structure of bondage and alienation, and the need for someone to be liberated, in order that the rest may be liberated. Hence it does not isolate individual liberation from the social.

39. Secondly, making an analysis of the behavioural structure, which is at work in an alienated social context it recognizes the active and passive roles respectively of the oppressors and the oppressed in the process.

40. Thirdly, it proposes a correspondingly proportionate strategy of non violent non-cooperation and civil disobedience, with the penal consequence of voluntary suffering for breaking the bondage and oppression. The

suffering confers, secures and proves the fitness of the passive resistance for freedom, and frees the oppressor as well, and reconciles them in a new human fellowship.

41. In order to preserve the freedom, justice and fellowship, secured by such sacrificial suffering, that just and free society is conceived in terms of small social structural units of self-governing and self-supporting village and town units, without the need for big or centralized governing machinery, which itself is to function in a spirit of trusteeship.

42. In this way Gandhi brings the religio-spiritual heritage of India to the liberative task and at once merges it with the Christian model of Christ's suffering love which breaks the oppression of the sin of the world. Thereby he challenges Christianity to a rediscovery of the liberative potential of its own paradigm.

43. After Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave has taken trusteeship a step further through the concept and practice of *bhudan*. And Jayaprakash Narayan with his 'total liberation' has pointed to the validity of civil disobedience even in democratic political structures.

44. The Gandhian approach of behavioural analysis overlooks the fact that the behaviour pattern is conditioned largely by the socio-cultural and political structures. Building its system on an optimistic view of human nature, it relies more idealistically on the goodness of the individual than on realistic understanding of the social system. His vision of equality within *varnadharm*a again seems unrealizable in practice. Trusteeship likewise depends too much on the goodness of the individual.

45. While rejecting capitalism, we are not yet clear on the alternative for India. We need an Indian form of socialism which may have to borrow from Marxism, Gandhism and other Indian systems. The search for an Indian alternative has to continue.

#### **IV. Towards an Indian Theology of Liberation**

46. Liberation is understood as integral. It begins here and moves towards the New Age. It is liberation of the whole person and the entire social order from everything that oppresses and alienates. Person and society are not extrinsic to each other. They are interior, each to the other, and they are together. Liberation, therefore, cannot be purely individualistic, spiritual or psychic; it will necessarily be social and political. Political includes first, corporate action for different, equal, relations of production and power; it includes, secondly, a critical awareness of structures and a new social consciousness which arise from action around issues and from confrontation with concrete experiences of oppression. It follows that mere almsgiving, alleviation of suffering and relief measures are not liberation. They may be necessary as emergency measures. Institutionalised, they become part of the system of oppression unless they are explicitly presented as a criticism of and protest against the system which produces wretchedness for the masses.

47. The ultimate basis of liberation theology is our Christian faith in the incarnational self-giving of the Divine in Jesus Christ as well as our responsible existence in an ongoing history. The faith enables us to understand history in terms of Divine involvement which transforms life in all its dimensions, social and economic, cultural and religious. This vision gives us courage to face the present and hope to work for a better future in collaboration with all people. In the religious traditions and liberative movements, we perceive the transforming work of the Divine. Liberation struggles are a part in this joint work. Theological reflection is possible only if the theologian is involved in the struggles of the people. Commitment to the poor is the first act which then calls for an analysis of the structures of oppression with the help of scientific tools offered by human sciences. Together with the people he reflects theologically on this praxis. India's religious heritage, especially the Christian faith experience, guides this re-

flection process. In India's pluralistic context this reflection has to be carried out with people of different faiths and ideologies, and expressed in pluralistic and exploratory fashion. The expression will be subject to constant revision because of the eschatological character of the liberation process.

48. The liberative struggles of the people and the activities, and the participatory experience of the theologian form a basic *locus theologicus* for an Indian theology of liberation. The traditions of our people with all their symbolic expressions in folklore, myths, festivals, celebrations, stories, rituals etc. with the key concepts like *dharma*, *mukti* and *lokasamgraha*, with the sacred scriptures of India as well as the life of great liberative personalities and movements will be made to interact with the situation and the struggle. The Indian theological reflection will thus try to discover their liberative and their oppressive potential. Thus a new hermeneutics for the interpretation of the Indian religious scriptures and symbols will evolve a holistic vision of reality, and an integral approach to liberation will be decisive in their approach.

49. Liberation theology makes a critical assessment of secular movements committed to human cause in India and tries to discover in them a genuine response to the Divine. It is from the critical interaction of all these factors with the Bible that a new experience of Christ and God can be had, and a fresh liberating word about them spoken.

50. The integral liberation of the human person and human history is the prime concern of an emerging theology of liberation. The economic, social, political and religious concerns, therefore, become essential dimensions of this theology. A heightened sensitivity to the aspirations and struggles of the Indian people to create and maintain a social order, that befits the human person has to be integral to it. Such an authentic human social order envisages a sharing of the earth and its riches as equals, a profound respect for and recognition of the freedom and dignity of every man and every woman. Among their inalienable rights are reasonable and comfortable

living conditions such as food, work and shelter, life free from every form of violence and exploitation, health and medical care, education and other basic amenities of life. Within these perspectives we see the contribution that could be made by Marxist ideology critically assessed and complemented by some of the insights of Gandhism. However, this can come only as the result of praxis.

51. The basic dynamics of theological reflection will be hope for a better future. In this regard the Indian eschatological notions like Ramraj, Swaraj and Sarvodaya as well as the secular idea of a classless society, which give hope to our people will be critically assimilated to this theological framework. A critical assimilation of the mystical traditions of India will give rise to a spirituality of liberation which integrates contemplative experience of the divine and transformative action in his history into one process.

### Conclusion

52. Here we wish to conclude. This is no great document. But it is our document. In sending it to you, friends, we are sending you a bit of ourselves. A bit which bears the mark of our limitations, confusions and fears, and hopefully, of our love. We have not come by all the clarity we sought, nor the depth of consensus we had desired. We are still groping for the specificity which surely is somewhere there, of our methodology. Not all of us are clear as the ideological framework required for effective struggle and a committed theology. Not many of us are immersed deep enough in the struggle of the masses. But we are determined to continue the walk together. We are agreed on the crucial import of theologies of liberation, of solidarity with the oppressed, and of commitment to their cause.

53. Commitment is fundamental. It names the place where the Divine as the Liberator of the oppressed may be met. As long as the oppressed exist, liberative praxis shall be the touch stone of the Divine. The Bible condemns to death all the gods that side with or connive at injustice

(Ps 82). Commitment to liberation provides the perspective necessary for re-interpreting history and redirecting its future. It creates the sensitivity capable of re-reading religions which often are ambiguous, which have been manipulated, which have enslaved as well as liberated, which therefore call for constant critical assessment. This we have discovered.

54. We have also discovered the "mystical depths" of action for the other: for the other's, the brother's and the sister's, dignity, freedom and rice. Such action and combat are under the grip of the Divine, and suffused with the Spirit who is life. Our theology will keep in abiding touch with these divine depths of ordinary daily life committed to the other, and will strive to disclose ever more fully the spirituality of the political.

55. The place where we are going is the New Earth, the New City which the Divine gathers in its arms beyond the strife and bloodshed of the market (Rev. 21–22). The place where we are going is the New Age, the Eschaton. Because the Eschaton is wholly new and radically different we refuse to settle down in the present; we refuse to absolutize the status quo or anything already achieved in society or in Church; we refuse to be satisfied with little and big reforms in what is. Because the Eschaton is radically different we cannot but commit ourselves to radically transformative praxis. It is thus we can open up history to the Parousia. It is thus we can live out our faith-hope in the return of the Slain Son of Man and the rising up of all the Crucified of history.

56. And now, friends, we must pause and be silent. Silence is integral to our theology. It is liberation from verbiage, from the pollution of noise and from the closed world of words. We await your response. In the mean time we nurse the hope that when we meet again we shall have grown beyond what we have said here, and shall be able to re-read this document with a smile and with compassion.

## Indian Theological Association (ITA)

ITA whose Statement is given above, is an Association of catholic theologians representing the whole of the Indian subcontinent. It was started in 1976 under the auspices of Jeevadhara with the express purpose of promoting theologizing in India. In January 1976 a week-long dialogue between bishops and theologians was arranged by the then CBCI General Secretary at Jeevan Jyoti, Hyderabad, the first and perhaps the last of its kind. It was not by accident that the organizers of Jeevadhara held the inaugural meeting of ITA immediately after the dialogue. In communion with the Bishops, yet keeping full freedom of thought and expression, the Association has, up to date, followed the tradition of Jeevadhara in not doning any official garb in the form of hierarchical approbation or appointment.

The theme discussed at the inaugural meeting was: *The Role of Theologians in India Today*. ITA has since grown in size and importance so that it is a force to be reckoned with in the Church in India today. The membership has risen to hundred and forty and is on the increase. The other themes discussed at the annual gatherings are: *Theological vision of the Indian Church Today*, *Religious Pluralism*, *Salvation in the Indian Context*, *Political Theology in the Context of India*, *Reconciliation in India*, *Searching for an Indian Ecclesiology*, *Theological Education in India* and *Towards an Indian Theology of Liberation*.

Three of the last four have been published in book form under the same titles and the last is in the press if not already out. There is a grand publishing project in the offing: Publication of a series of Monographs, and it is entrusted to an editorial team of experts.

Lastly a word about the Statement. It shows that ITA has come of age, and that the Indian theologians have started renouncing arm-chair theologies unrelated to the hard realities of life, and are convinced of the futility of shaping theologies of liberation in class-rooms. They want an authentic theology, not any import from outside or its imitations. They 'are agreed on the crucial import of their solidarity with the oppressed' where the Divine is met.

General Editor

# **Statement**

**Conference of Religious India  
National Assembly 1986**

## **1. Introduction**

1.1 "The powerful and almost irresistible aspirations that people have for liberation constitute one of the principal signs of the times which the Church has to examine and interpret in the light of the Gospel", says the Vatican document: 'Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation' (1,1). It also sounds a strong condemnation "of those who keep the Poor in misery, who profit from that misery, who notice it while doing nothing about it, or who remain indifferent to it."(XI, 1)

1.2 In the light of this urgent call of the Church and the central message of the Gospel, heard in the context of India with its massive Poverty and its pluri-form religious traditions, we the Major Religious Superiors have reflected on the theme of liberation to which we as religious are profoundly committed. We present here the results of our reflection.

## **2. The Emergence of the Theology of Liberation in India**

2.1 In colonial India, the immense Poverty and misery caused by incoming capitalism through the destruction of social and economic relationships, was met by institutionalized charity.

The supposition here was that Poverty could not be eradicated but could be alleviated by inviting the rich to share with the Poor. This approach did not allow any role to those helped.

After the independence of India the belief that Poverty could be eradicated through the development of

natural and human resources, led to the launching of large-scale educational, health and development programmes. These required a great investment of money and hence allowed the beneficiaries only a very limited participation.

Since the seventies, the consciousness is emerging that Poverty is a man-made phenomenon, and that it can be eradicated by the proper organization and total participation of all the people concerned. For religious concerned about poverty this means that they would have to pass from the role of initiators of charitable institutions or managers of development projects to that of collaborators with the Poor. They would have to identify with the Poor in their hopes and fears, sufferings and joys, insecurities and struggles in order to work for their total liberation. This does not mean that the older forms of service to the Poor are to be abandoned as irrelevant; rather they are to be subordinated and integrated into the vision of the new approach. The promotion of justice must therefore be a primary concern, one that will inspire all forms of our service to the Poor.

2.2 This approach calls for a new way of theologizing. Such theologizing can no longer mean drawing conclusions from established and clearly enunciated principles and applying them to concrete historical situations through accommodation and adaptation. Instead we need to listen to the Spirit speaking through the Poor. Listening to the poor calls for a sharing of their experience of struggle, a questioning of the present social order which is the root cause of their oppression, and action with them aimed at structural change. In this way the message of the crucified Lord is rediscovered in the groans of the modern crucified; and the past of the church rediscovered and made relevant to the present. Genuinely inculturated theology will then emerge.

2.3 This commitment of the religious to the service of the Poor is a spiritual adventure. It implies a new asceticism: the denial of greed and prejudice. It calls for liberating prayer which is a critical reflection before God on our

faith experience, in our relationship with God and the world. It requires new values such as solidarity with the oppressed; genuine participation in community; and acceptance of the insecurity which results from the absence of traditional structures of the religious life; and an unbounded trust in God's enduring presence in the midst of the people.

### **3. Difficulties and problems**

This new way of living out our religious commitment poses serious difficulties that have to be faced squarely.

3.1 Our concept of religious life itself was evolved at a time when flight from the world and isolation in the service of God was the ideal. We have to revise this to suit the requirements of new ministries, without however sacrificing the unity of the community and the continuity of tradition. This calls for an ongoing reflection on our involvement, from which alone an adequate methodology for action will emerge. In this way we shall be able to avoid false oppositions, such as those between matter and spirit, soul and body, evangelization and liberation, which have often led to confusion and conflict.

3.2 The life style of many of our religious communities makes our involvement with the Poor more difficult.

3.3 The lack of adequate tools makes it difficult to evaluate our involvement and so allows us to feel satisfied with an exaggerated estimate of our commitment to the Poor.

3.4 The more seriously we take our commitment to the Poor, the more our treatment of our employees and co-workers in our communities and institutions will call for self-examination. Justice, like charity, begins at home.

3.5 Involvement with the Poor makes it difficult for us to meet the financial needs of our apostolates and those of the members of our congregation. This can lead to a questionable dependence on foreign funds.

3.6 In the field of the apostolate, where people have a say in decision-making, the role of the religious Superior is a delicate one. It requires greater involvement in the activities of individual religious and greater attention to the stirrings of the Spirit. That the religious who face these new challenges were formed in a different set-up and are often ill-equipped to meet the problems and dangers that arise, only compounds the difficulties of the Superior's role.

3.7 Young religious often show considerable sensitivity to the cry of the Poor but can be discouraged by lack of support, and sometimes even criticism, from their communities. Getting caught up in institutional commitments often has the same effect.

3.8 This call to involvement with the Poor often leads to conflicts with ecclesiastical and civil authorities and even with members of the community. These call for an ongoing process of dialogue, undertaken in a spirit of openness to the Church while keeping intact the prophetic role of religious life.

3.9 A difficulty facing many congregations is the seeming resistance of several to accept the new thrust towards involvement with the Poor.

#### New hopes and expectations

Though the difficulties are many we believe that these can be overcome.

4.1 The problems we face require of us a preparation that is spiritual and theological, sociological and psychological. But together with these we need an attitudinal preparation. This implies attention to what goes on in the depths of our hearts: the stirrings of the Spirit and the inner call of Christ, revealed in our hopes and aspirations and in the challenges of the difficulties and failures we encounter. Only by growing in true authenticity and enduring fidelity to our religious commitment can lasting results be attained. The discerning role of the community should not be overlooked in this process.

4.2 A radical change has to be effected in the method of training especially of young religious so that they can grow imbibing the genuine message of the Gospel. The location and setting of our houses of formation, their life-style and the outlook of the formation personnel should make possible a constant interaction with the lives of the Poor. Those religious who did not have the advantage of such a formation can be helped through seminars, lectures, exposure to actual involvement situations and other programmes of ongoing formation.

4.3 A careful and continuing evaluation will help us to identify obstacles to our total commitment to the Poor in our apostolates and enable us to re-orient them.

4.4 We need to be convinced that religious life is not merely a call to individual perfection but a call to radical discipleship in community.

### **Conclusion**

Our reflections have been for us an occasion of growth — growth in our awareness of the many dimensions (social, economic, political, cultural, religious) of the liberation to which God summons humankind; growth too in our commitment to its realization in our troubled world. We firmly believe that the God of History calls us in Jesus Christ through the cry of our people to collaborative action for justice. In this venture we wish to join forces with all who are moved by the oppressive situation in which the bulk of our people exist. For the concern for justice is not a uniquely Christian concern. We wish to respond to today's needs with the same earnestness that characterized the response of the founders and foundresses of our religious congregations in their moment of history. We salute those members of our congregations who through their radical involvement inspire and challenge us to similar heights of self-surrender in the cause of justice. We look confidently to our bishops for effective leadership, guidance and support in this endeavour.

## A Brief Meditation on the CRI 1986 Statement on Commitment to Liberation

This statement, which sums up the reflections of the National Assembly of the Conference of Religious, India, held in Vijayawada from 5 to 9 of January 1986, is of great significance for the church in India. It marks a radical step the religious congregations, through their major superiors, are taking together to reorient the life and work of the many thousands of women and men serving in many parts of the country. This radical reorienting, if implemented, will affect their apostolic services, their target groups, their understanding of society with its interplay of interests, forces and structures, their spirituality, their conception of and approach to theology, their life-style, formation, community organization and authority patterns. The statement is concise but clear about these and other implications. No less is it clear about the difficulties that do or might obstruct the new path, and of possible conflicts. But the authors of the statement are confident of coping with them.

1. The heart of this terse, clear and seemingly simple statement is the theme of liberation, the primacy of justice and the commitment of all the religious congregations in India to these related and central Gospel realities. To liberation "we as religious are profoundly committed", affirms the statement (1.2). A bold declaration, at once evangelical, timely and heartening. The commitment is to work for the "total liberation" of the poor (2.1d), a liberation which has many dimensions, social, economic, political, cultural and religious (conclusion). At the very outset the statement recalls, together with the 1984 Vatican Instruction on 'Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation', that "one of the principal signs of the times" is "the powerful and almost irresistible aspirations that people have for liberation" (1.1). Hence the statement's interest in "the emergence of the theology of liberation in India" (2). A care for justice is here implied. "The promotion of justice must therefore be a primary concern" (2.1d). How about the primacy of charity? CRI would probably reply by

denying any competition between the two. Justice is the basic, the utterly basic, form of charity. To set justice aside and talk about charity is meaningless and dishonest. "The God of history calls us in Jesus Christ through the cry of our people to collaborative action for justice" (conclusion). In a magnificent concluding gesture the major superiors "salute those members of our congregations who through their radical involvement inspire and challenge us to similar heights of self-surrender in the cause of justice" (conclusion). This positive appreciation and hearty approval of radical involvement is a different language from the old, censuring jargon of caution, prudence, supernaturality, submission and inaction.

2. It is significant that the major superiors chose so clearly and boldly to opt for liberation and the theology of liberation in a conference in which they were assured by no less a personage than the Archbishop of Trivandrum, Benedict Mar Gregorios, that they "were wasting their time discussing liberation theology", since "liberation theology is losing ground even in Latin America where it originated". The Archbishop added that "the purpose of the church is not to build a society in the world but to reach people to heaven" (SAR news, January 12-13, 1986). The major superiors, however, listened to other speakers as well, to Rex Pai, Yvon Ambroise, Felix Wilfred, Joseph Neetilal and George Soares-Prabhu, and chose to think differently from the Archbishop. They found themselves in agreement with certain portions of the Vatican's 1984 Instruction, namely, its recognition of people's irresistible aspirations for liberation, and its condemnation of those who cause and or ignore the poverty and misery of the masses of women and men (l.l) But here too the major superiors show themselves discerning, truth-seeking and independent. They lay aside the tendentious negativity of the bulk of that Instruction and its distinctive animus against all current theologies of liberation, and let themselves be inspired by its positive concerns. Eventually, with the publication of the 1986 Vatican Instruction on 'Christian Freedom and Liberty', the major superiors may discover

that the new road they chose to walk is becoming the choice (however reluctant) of the officials of the Church too.

3. Logically, therefore, the poor and their poverty become the statement's central pre-occupation. References to these abound. The words occur some twenty times which is a great deal for so short a statement. They occur mostly in section 2 and 3. After the Introduction, section two begins with an analysis of poverty and attitudes towards poverty (2:1). It is not only one of the most interesting portions of the Statement, but constitutes a decisive basis for what is to follow. There is at the start a brief allusion to the link that exists between colonialism, the capitalism it introduced, and "the immense poverty and misery" the two together created in our country, and, in subtle ways, continue to create and maintain. No one can pass by this allusion untouched. No one can come across it without being pressed to study more fully the economic and social history of our country, together with the economic purposes and under-development mechanisms of political domination. Such a study cannot be optional for any one who subscribes to this statement with a will to work for the elimination of man-made poverty, and the establishment of justice, and the creation of a new social order which can reflect the Kingdom of God which is at hand. The rest of 2.1 is an analytical history of the changing responses the church in India (and elsewhere) has been giving to the problem of poverty. There are three stages or periods: the colonial days, after independence and since the seventies. There are three corresponding responses: relief and alleviation through charity; development through modernization by large-scale projects; and organizing of the people for their own liberation.

Each of these responses corresponds to a particular understanding of poverty and its causes. The first response is born of the belief that poverty and the rich/poor divide cannot be eliminated because it is the work of nature, or the decision of fate, or the will of God. Doubtless, this is upper-class ideology. The second response

attributes poverty to people's backwardness or failure to develop science, technology and rational ordering of society. Borrow these from the West, modernize and poverty shall be overcome. This is imperialist ideology which carefully hides two facts: that it is the West with its science, technology and rationality that underdeveloped Asia, Africa and Latin America ('to underdevelop' being an active verb!) and that the process of modernization has only been deepening our dependence and compounding our poverty and misery, and catching us in the Debt Trap. The third response understands poverty as man-made and unjust, as the result of a particular economic system. The removal of poverty must begin with the liberation of the people; and this begins with their socio-political awakening and organisation.

This analysis is crucial. On its validity and acceptance rests the whole program of religious reorientation and radical commitment. The three models imply three different attitudes and spiritualities, three different theologies of God, and three different views of human beings, society and history. The "false oppositions" mentioned in 3.1 as a possible threat to the new move and the conflicts and resistance pointed to in 3.8 and 3.9 have their roots in our conscious or subconscious adherence to one of these three analyses and attitudes and our rejection of the others. The first two models of understanding poverty and dealing with it perpetuate dependence on the rich and (in the case of the second model) on capitalist technology and concept of development elaborated in the dominant wealthy West. That is why adoption of the third model of analysis and action with its emphasis on people's participation and people's mental and material resources can come into conflict with the other two models and prove a threat to the West and to its westernized allies among us.

4. From a praxis (corresponding to the third model) of organizing the people, of identifying with the poor, and of joining their struggles for justice, springs a new way of theologizing which is described in 2.2. This method,

which the statement claims will yield a "genuinely inculturated theology", differs from the deductive methods of scholasticism as well as from the method, for instance, of the second Instruction from the Vatican on freedom and liberation. The Vatican document indicates the "principal theoretical and practical aspects" of the theme; "applications to different local situations" have to be made by local churches (no. 2). The CRI statement takes the stand that the new way of theologizing called for by commitment to the people's struggles "can no longer mean drawing conclusions from... principles and applying them to concrete historical situations..." It defines the new, right method in terms of 'listening to the Spirit speaking through the poor', in terms of listening to the poor, sharing in their experience of struggle, questioning the existing social order, and engaging in action together with them for structural change. The methodology most characteristic of the theology of liberation is endorsed and accepted. "In this way", says the statement, "the message of the crucified Lord is rediscovered in the groans of the modern crucified." This is profoundly theological and mystical; it is authentically biblical, historical and human. In the hungry people we meet the hungry Lord Jesus. We touch the wounds of Jesus in the wounds of the people and so encounter the moment when Faith comes to birth with the cry, My Lord and my God. The past, both of the bible and the church, is thus rediscovered and made relevant to the present. There is both continuity and discontinuity.

5. Accordingly, the statement itself could have, should have, started by "listening to the Spirit speaking in the poor", by hearing the cry of the oppressed, and reflecting on the experience of shared struggles. It starts instead with two quotes from the Vatican Instruction already mentioned which practically rejects the new approach to theology affirmed by the CRI as necessary. We are told in the statement that religious are making their commitment to liberation "in the light of this urgent call of the church" to act against whatever keeps the poor in misery. Our own situation of "massive poverty" and pluriform religious

traditions is seen as the context in which the call of the church is heard (1.2). But do we (have to) wait for the call of the church, especially when the 'church' is improperly identified with its office-holders? Do we have to wait when "the groans of the crucified" of today fill our ears and fill the land? In the Exodus story God hears not the call of any church but the cry of the oppressed and their appeal to be free of slave-masters. The people's suffering and their miserable state is what moves God to act for their liberation. Throughout Old Testament history it is the cry of the poor, the oppressed, the widow, the orphan and the unpaid worker that God hears and heeds. Jesus' practice is no different. He hears and answers not the call of his church but the call of the sick, the blind and the broken, the call of hunger and guilt and socio-religious ostracism. We would do well to hear the people's call and cry direct without getting it filtered through non-contextual instructions which on the whole are witnesses to a reluctance to give certain signs of the times, like the emergence of the theology of liberation, their proper historical weightage, and which seem to be far more pre-occupied with abstract orthodoxy than with the dynamic truth of the people living, loving and struggling within the "agony" of an ongoing history. The statement, true to its own best insights, could have started with the reality of the people. The massive poverty of the country is itself the call we hear. The more so since "the Spirit speaks through the poor" (2.2), and since "we believe that the God of history calls us in Jesus Christ through the cry of our people..."(conclusion)

6. Every theology is fed by deep-running currents of spirituality. All action for justice and liberation has its roots close to hidden spiritual streams. It is with reference to spirituality that the CRI statement strikes me as particularly rich and promising. After describing the three historical attitudes and approaches to poverty the document described the adoption of the third and authentic path as a transition, a passage, a passover, a possibly painful paschal endeavour and an experience of dying to the old ideolo-

gies and approaches and rising to the new. "For religious concerned about poverty this (the new consciousness about poverty and its removal which has emerged since the seventies) means that they would have to pass from the role of initiators of charitable institutions or managers of development projects to that of collaborators with the poor." (2. 1d) It means a *kenosis*. It means flesh-becoming and tenting among those who are socially weak ('flesh') and without power. To many of us this would amount to a painful conversion, a paschal agony, an experience of dying to old concepts, visions and privileges in order to rise with the people to new possibilities of the human. This is quite insightful and challenging.

Aspects of this spirituality are identification with the poor in their hopes, sufferings and struggles (2.1d); solidarity with the oppressed (2.3); readiness to listen to the poor and to the groans of all the crucified on the earth, and attentiveness to the Spirit (2.2); a closeness therefore to the Crucified Jesus not only in imagination, sentiment and symbol but in his living members of warm flesh and blood. The courage and the clarity to question the present social order is an element in this spirituality of responsibility. Called for is a new asceticism that will struggle against greed (which is idolatry-Col 3:5, which is the main religion that the Colonialists brought to our lands and that prevails today in the culture of commodity fetish); as well as against prejudice about the poor and the powerless (2.3). Particularly noteworthy is the statement's integrated and, holistic vision of religious life, faith and spirituality. This vision rejects "false oppositions" which have been rampant in the church far too long, and have "often led to confusion and conflict", and oftener to sheer stultification of biblical Faith (3.1). Religious life is no longer "flight from the world and isolation in the service of God", but radical responsibility for God's dear world, for God's precious history and God's beloved people. All these and ourselves too has God placed as a trust in our hands. A wholly new way of looking at and experiencing reality is suggested: one that is deeply christian in place of the unbiblical

negation of creation and history. Henceforth we feel free to see every bush as aflame with God, and view every sister and brother as God's sacrament, and sense the outbreak of revelation in every significant event. We may now embrace history as divinely called and as the place of radical grace and foundational encounter with God. That explains how the liberation to which God calls us has many dimensions: social, economic, political, cultural and religious (conclusion). The religious, however, is not an aspect or dimension apart, but is the Godwardness and the humanness of all the facets of liberation and life.

No less significant is the use of the word 'radical'. Radicality will be a main feature of this newly committed spirituality shared with and from the poor. It is not untraditional to define religious life as "a call to radical discipleship" (4.4). But it is startlingly new to hear authority's voice raised in appreciation of those who have got radically involved in the cause of justice. And it is heartening to hear that voice holding them up as models and saluting them. What is being programmed in the statement is "our total commitment to the poor" with a view to their "total liberation" (4.3; 21d). What is being programmed is the service of the poor seen as "a spiritual adventure" (2.3), and a "new way of life" (3). Hence the very concept of religious life is to be "revised" (3.1); "a radical change has to be effected in the method of training", especially by "making possible a constant interaction with the lives of the poor" (4.2). An aspect of radicality is the readiness to take risks and live without securities in a life-style which is envisaged as being outside of "traditional structures of the religious life" (2.3).

In addition, the new spirituality to be developed will be social and communitarian. Our call is to "radical discipleship in community" and not to individual perfection (4.4). As already noted, religious life is not flight from the world and service of God in isolation (3.1). Rather, it is commitment to the community right within its struggles for freedom and justice; commitment to the social-historical realization and manifestation of the Kingdom of God. Hence

the importance, underscored by the statement, of "genuine participation in community" (2.3) and of "the discerning role of the community" (4.1). The fact is that religious community is no longer a reality walled off from the rest of human beings, and from the places and process where history is being set free and led forward. It consists rather in sharing of life and struggle with an ever-expanding neighbourhood and with the masses of the people. Religious community is not something static and given; it is built up daily by becoming neighbour to ever widening circles of people struggling for freedom and life.

7. A refreshing feature of the CRI statement is its self-critical realism and its fearlessness and trust. The statement is aware of "serious difficulties" in the way of commitment to the liberation of the poor it is opting for. But it tells itself quietly that the difficulties will be squarely met (3). The very life-style of many of our communities make involvement with the poor difficult (3.2). That such life-style stands rejected and is due for replacement is understood. Involvement with the poor makes it difficult to meet financial needs of members and apostolates. "This can lead to questionable dependence on foreign funds." (3.5) The suggestion being made here is that life-styles be radically remoulded, and apostolates of colonial origin, embodying colonial ideas and values, be radically rethought. Living and sharing the Gospel of Jesus and struggling together with the masses for liberty and dignity need not be so expensive an affair as to need funding from abroad unless the colonial understanding of the Gospel is still riding our minds. The statement admits that the radically involved may have to face criticism from their own communities (3.7), and that the congregations may have to face resistance of members to the new thrust towards involvement with the poor (3.9). The good news too can sometimes be bad news, and sadden; and the peace of Christ may at first work like a sword and divide (Mark 10:17-22; Mt 10:34-36). Para 3.6 gives evidence of rare sensitivity in perceiving a new and delicate way of rethinking authority and its exercise in areas and matters where the people have a say in the making

and taking of decisions. The statement does not shy away from the fact that involvement with the poor often leads to conflict with ecclesiastical and civil authorities. No analysis is made why this happens; the reasons are taken as fairly widely and well known. The major superiors do not pause here to advise prudence and moderation (against radicalism) and avoidance of clashes with the hierarchies of State or Church. Instead they propose straight dialogue and openness, and, with the courage and candour, insist on "keeping intact the prophetic role of religious life". This is dignified Christian language.

8. References to the Holy Spirit are few, but these few are placed at significant points of the project of re-orientation. The "need to listen to the Spirit speaking through the poor" (2.2) is the basis and take-off point of authentic and relevant theology. It is also the foundation on which commitment to the liberation of the poor can be lived out. The statement then calls for "greater attention to the stirrings of the Spirit" in the depths of the heart, in the heart of history, and in delicate and dangerous situations (3.6). Finally the basic preparation and the attitudinal changes required by the new thrust implies that we pay attention to what is going on in the depths of our hearts, namely, "the stirrings of the Spirit and the inner call of Christ, revealed in our hopes and aspirations, and in the challenges of the difficulties and failures we encounter" (4.1). But our hearts depths are not sealed monads; they are in vital communion with one another and with the depths of history and the heart of the cosmos and of the process which moulds us and which we mould. The stirrings of the Spirit are at once interior and cosmic and historical. So is the call of Christ. That is why they can be discerned in the challenges and dangers and encounters of society and history.

We have reason to be proud of this fine statement. We are thankful for it. It is a gift from the CRI to the Indian church and the Indian people. It is also an act of religious prophecy.

# We Work Hard all night long and Catch Nothing

Adolfo Pérez Esquivel (winner of the 1980 Nobel Peace Prize) has in his book *Christ in a Poncho* this significant idea, a sort of basic maxim: "the first step towards liberation... occurs when a human being becomes aware that he or she is a person".

Far from remaining content with being mere objects, or cogs in a social or economic wheel, or sheer numbers open to manipulation, a significant number of poor people are becoming aware of their personhood. They are beginning to discover their dignity and their rights; and some at least are recognizing themselves as made in the image of God. The poor are starting to raise questions, to analyse their predicament, to listen and to speak. They are acquiring a grasp of their social, political and economic situation. All this, together with the discovery of a God with whom they can genuinely identify, and the discovery of groups of people who stand with them in solidarity, has produced a new personal awakening and a significant social resurrection. This is true of the fisherpeople's movement in Kerala.

## The fisherpeople's movement

The traditional fisher community of Kerala form roughly 3.2 percent of the population of the State. Over eight lakh people in the artisanal fishing sector in Kerala is today facing a grave crisis: growing pauperisation together with severe depletion of marine resources. This fisher community, almost a million strong, has been politically and economically quite weak, with the result that they have never been seriously taken into consideration by

any party or by the Government till very recent times. They have been quietly ignored because they were unorganized and deemed unorganizable. The average allotment of State funds for the Fisheries sector in Kerala during the period of several Five Year plans amounts to not more than 1.2 percent of the total project allotment. About 93 percent of the fisher population live below the poverty line. This shows that in the planning exercise of the State, an already depressed and highly exploited fisher community who needed urgently to be lifted up from their below-average economic status, was allotted resources well below levels required by their numerical strength and crying needs.

The crisis in the traditional sector started in the early fifties when the Indo-Norwegian Project introduced mechanized fishing with trawlers and purseine nets. Scientific opinion the world over has been categorically against trawling due to its ecological destructiveness. In Norway itself it was severely restricted and finally given up. Trawling "indiscriminately hauls up everything in its path." The impact of trawling and purseining on the variety and the quantity of fish catch was felt most harshly during the late seventies. With steady drop in catch, economic pressures on the community increased and the total situation worsened. Because if its extreme economic backwardness the community fell victim to all the social ills that go with extreme poverty such as widespread illiteracy, poor health, low savings, high birth-rate, and deep-going exploitation by richer sections and middlemen. About 60 percent of the children suffer from tuberculosis. Literacy is below 30 percent as against the state average of over 70 percent.

A weak section like the fisherfolk of Kerala naturally cannot pull their own weight in the competitive political arena unless they are conscientized and well organized under efficient and committed leadership. This precisely was lacking. The fisherfolk were divided in the first place along religious lines into three groups: Hindus, Muslims and Christians, with no history of any kind of co-operation

between them. Then again they were divided between nominal trade unions controlled by numerous political parties who themselves did not take the fisher community seriously.

"Apart from early signs of dwindling catches, trawlers proved to be a menace since they fished all day and night and in shallow waters where the traditional vessels are at work." Many incidents of destruction of traditional fishers' craft or gear by careless trawlers, and even cases of death of fishermen at sea soon led to clashes. When trawling was introduced as part of the Indo-Norwegian Project, it was meant for deep-sea fishing, but soon capitalist greed and the lure of quick profit turned it into ruinous inshore fishing with the collusion of ruling fronts.

The existing set-up was not prepared to question the systematic violence that was being inflicted upon the fisher community. But as soon as the fisherfolk started resisting the violence of the rich who killed their children inch by inch, they were denounced by political and religious leaders as users of violence and of unethical and anti-christian methods of struggle for justice. Among others, a few priests and sisters belonging to different religious organizations and working with fisher people in various coastal districts of Kerala or also in the interior, felt it was part of their christian duty and gospel commitment to join the exploited people in calling in question the colossal injustice that was being meted out to the fisher community. It was in this context that the Kerala Svatantra Matsyatalilai Federation came into existence in the early eighties.

### We worked hard all night long and...

"Now he was standing one day by the Lake of Gennesareth. The crowd pressed round him, listening to the word of God. He caught sight of two boats close to the bank. The fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats. It was Simon's. He asked Simon to put out a little from the shore. Then he sat down

and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said: "Put out into deep water and pay out your net for a catch. Simon said: Master, we worked hard all night long and caught nothing." (Lk. 5:1-5)

Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, the sons of Zebedee and two more of his disciples were together. Simon Peter said, I am going fishing.

"They replied, we will come with you. They went out and got into the boat but caught nothing that night. It was light by now, and there stood Jesus on the shore. He called out, Have you caught anything, friends ? And they answered, No. John 21:1-5 As he stepped ashore he saw a large crowd. And he took pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he set himself to teach them at some length... His disciples came up to him and said: it is getting very late; send them away, and they can go to the villages round about, to buy themselves something to eat." (Mk 6:34-36)

That was the situation. The fisherfolk toiled all night and day long, and caught nothing. There was nothing to catch. The trawlers and purseine nets had swept up everything before them. The people were left hungry and poor; like sheep without a shepherd, unorganized and leaderless, uncared for and resourceless. Send them away? Put their plight out of your mind and think of something more pleasant, or sublime, or pious? If Jesus is the way we must walk, then compassion welds the believer and the sufferer into a single reality. If Jesus is the way we wish to walk, then we assume responsibility for the neglected masses. "He replied, Give them something to eat yourselves. How many loaves have you? Go and see." (Mk 6:37-38; 8:2-6) Will it do to share out five loaves and two fish among the people? Do it today and tomorrow and the day after? Provisions will be there. After all there is American Relief Everywhere! And people will be happy, dependent and docile. Nice babes, so very grateful!

No, says Jesus. The people must be taught. They must be enabled to see and to understand, to question and to critique, to demolish and to build, to act, to take their destiny into their hands, to be responsible subjects of their own history. They must be challenged to adulthood, to creativity, to the sonship and daughterhood of a God who creates and wills that life be abundant and free for all. "Put out into deep water, he said, and pay out your net for a catch. Throw the net out to starboard and you will find something." (Lk 5:4; Jn 21:6) And, stand erect, hold your heads high, because your liberation is near at hand (Lk 21:28).

### **Struggles and issues**

Organized struggles on the part of the fisherfolk are surely recent in origin. There is, however, a whole history of sporadic outbursts of protest. The late sixties and early seventies saw brief spells of struggle and conflict over particular issues like destruction of boats or nets in the sea, or payment of compensation from public funds. Community-based organizations of fisher people sprang up in the late seventies. They held demonstrations and picketings over individual issues. In 1981 there was a massive and effective struggle which succeeded in forcing the Government to appoint a commission — the Babu Paul Commission — to study the problems of fisher people and recommend remedies. The recommendations of this Commission have been treated with brazen indifference and left largely unimplemented.

It was at this juncture that the *Kerala Svatantra* (independent) *Matsyatolilai* (fish-worker) Federation shaped up, uniting the fisher people across and beyond communal lines and narrow party affiliations and upholding their cause with fresh vigour. Apart from a few priests and sisters who work with the people, the leadership of the Federation lies with the fishermen and fisherwomen themselves. The Federation led the renowned struggle of 1984-85, which highlighted such issues as (i) the neglect by the Government of fisherpeople's interests; (ii) the destruction of marine ecology, and fish depletion; (iii) the non-implemen-

tation of existing laws of the Kerala Marine Regulations Act of 1981; (iv) the lopsided fisheries planning based mainly on export earning possibilities rather than the optimal use of marine resources for the development of the people; and (v) the need for certain urgent welfare measures for the people. The struggle forced the government to announce a number of concessions in favour of the fisherpeople, and to appoint a second Commission — Kalaver Commission — for further study of a cluster of problems related to fishing and fisherfolks' interests.

There have been other achievements equally worth noting. The struggle succeeded in focussing public and media attention on the plight of the traditional fisher people of Kerala, and on the ecological problem of fish depletion in the Kerala coastal and inland waters. Despite a great deal of confused media publicity, a few matters of importance became as clear as daylight. It became clear that the fisherfolk's plight was unbearable, and that the government had neglected its duty to legislate properly and to implement laws necessary for the fisheries. It became evident that there was large scale destruction of the ecology of the sea due to "bottom trawling" and "purseining": serious fish depletion was a reality on the coastal waters of Kerala. Not only the Kerala State but the whole nation was awakened in some measure to a new consciousness of these realities. The occasion provoked a number of scientific studies on various aspects of the problem. It helped develop deep solidarity among the fisherfolk themselves and people committed to justice and freedom. The struggle proved that even an illiterate and poor working class group could be deeply conscientized and organized provided there is a determined and dedicated group of people ready and competent to do this hard work in view of responsible struggles. It also became clear that independent movements of this kind will have to face opposition from leaders of existing political and religious-communal groups which stand for the status quo. This independence from political and communalistic parties and groups is one of the characteristics of this movement; as such it is new in Kerala's trade union scenario. Another unique feature of the 1984-85

struggle was the active participation in it of a number of priests and sisters in support of the fisher people's demands. The media played up this novelty well beyond its deserts. For the media and for the public the part played by priests and sisters was a sort of breaking out of traditional role expectations of church life in Kerala.

**Now a priest happened to be travelling  
down the same road...**

But when he saw the man lying on the roadside, stripped, beaten, half dead, he passed by on the other side. In the same way a sister who came to the place saw him, and passed by on the other side. That is how Jesus shaped the story, with pain, I guess, in his heart, wishing all the while that he could honestly tell a different tale of priests, sisters and levites. There are christians who seek to sense what is in the heart of Jesus and to approximate the different reality he glimpsed in the distance. There are sisters and priests for whom human beings, oppressed and crucified human beings, are more than "sabbath", and greater and holier. It is true, then, that a few sisters and priests played a part in getting the disparate groups of fisher people conscientized and organized into a cohesive trade union with some ideological precision, some strategy for action, and the will to fight for justice. They were, on their part, touched and remade by their contact with the people and the work they did. They were themselves awokened afresh by the reality of the people.

In course of time, these sisters and priests who had been working among the poor fisherfolk in different parts of the State, began to contact and consult one another, to share experiences, and to coordinate their separate work and give it a common thrust on behalf of all the fisherfolk of Kerala, irrespective of castes, creeds and communities. They realized that if their movement was to have any impact on the scene their action must be corporate. What was new about this group of priests and sisters was, first, their clear perception of social realities and analytical grasp of the forces at work and the interests in conflict. Second,

their readiness to work together combined with their ability to transcend communalism of every sort. Third, their skill in conscientizing and organizing the masses of the poor along with a sense of dedication to a human cause. Fourth, their endeavour to remain in constant touch with Jesus and his Gospel for inspiration and guidance, as well as with the deepest spiritual sources of all religions. It was thus they were able to use all available scientific and analytical tools to study and understand social problems, and enable the fisher people to stand together to confront these problems with courage and a spirit of sacrifice.

### **And many women were there**

Unlike most of the popular trade unions, the fisher people's union comprises not only men but women and children as well; the whole community, in effect. Fisher-women made a significant contribution to the recent struggles of their people. Hundreds of women demonstrated, picketed and courted arrest during the action. Quite a large proportion of those who went on prolonged protest fasts on behalf of life on the coastal belt were women from the locality. This is not surprising, for it is women as a group that are made to bear the worst, the cruellest and the most degrading effects of poverty and injustice inflicted on any society.

Many women had followed Jesus from Calilee and looked after him. They followed Jesus to Calvary. They always follow their people's way of the cross. "And many women were there, watching from a distance." (Mtt 27:55-56; Mk 15:40-41; Lk 23:49). Why at a distance? The guards would not let them come closer? or they were afraid? Before the end, perhaps, they overcame their fear. "Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, and his mother's sister" and one or two other women (Jn. 19:25-27). They still stand close to the cross of their people, close to their crucified friends, brothers, fathers, husbands and sons. They will accompany the people through struggle and death, sorrowing and loving and struggling together till they can rejoice to see tombs open up to yield life restored,

renewed and triumphant as they rejoice to see wombs open up to deliver life new and tender and fresh with hope. The women ask: when will all the tombs on our coast burst open? when will the resurrection of our people happen? who will roll back the stone from the entrance to the tomb? We shall roll it back together, say the women and the men.

### Things to remember

If there is one thing we wish to remember it is this: the fisher people, however extreme their poverty and affliction, are capable of splendid, disciplined, sustained, well-orchestrated struggle for justice and life and dignity. The people are great, when they can dialectically interact with challenging prophets. Another cherished memory of the struggles of 1984-85 will be the superb lesson they have given to Kerala on people's unity and community harmony. Hindus, Muslims and Christians struggled together as fisherfolk, as victims of oppression, as resisters to forces of domination. To the divided christian community of Kerala, too, this struggle gave a powerful lesson in unity and equality. The Latin-Syrian split, the bane of the Kerala church was completely set aside as irrelevant and pernicious for the sake of a common stand on behalf of the oppressed. The oppression the rich class inflicts and the money they make know no distinction of rites. The Baptism of poverty, humiliation and suffering incorporates all the poor of all the churches and no churches into the one crucified Body of Jesus. Through the people's struggles God is already bidding that Body rise and live.

Yet another memorable experience of significance has been spelt out by K.M. Sebastian: "Faith and theology have come to acquire new roots in the soil of people's experience — an experience that is integral, i.e., social, political, economic and religious. The consequence is a transition, at least as far as a section of the church is concerned, from a church restricted to 'charities' to a church associated with political action in solidarity with the poor;

from a church that is associated with the 'higher-ups' in society to a church that is tied to the interests of the oppressed; from a church that contributed to the maintenance of the status-quo to a church that has become a prophetic instrument of total (not excluding social) transformation. In the eyes of the powerful, the church has changed from being a helpful presence to a threatening and dangerous presence. Jesus, a dangerous presence to the powerful of his times, is felt to be alive and present today in the church."

In a world where a minority wields power and influence over others, the temptation is great to go in for quick results through the support of the powerful and the influential. But we realize that our option for the poor educates us to a different set of values and a different style of life. We stand with and learn from those who have no influence, no social power, no control over other people's lives. Their pedagogy is different from what we are used to. It is within the struggles for justice that the education of the non-influential mostly takes place.

This has created in us an awareness and a strong need to build up a spirituality that can resist the evil in us and around us, and can positively affirm and work with the divine presence operative in history, in human endeavours and secular movements. Involvement and solidarity with the poor have helped us to give meaning and relevance to religious life today.

### **The future**

No one should imagine that the fisherfolk's future is rosy and bright simply because they have demonstrated their capacity to struggle for justice and take risks. Many problems loom ahead. The people's "will to struggle" has to be sustained till the rulers prove themselves sincere in developing a sensible fisheries management policy and in implementing that policy consistently. Communal forces and party politics may yet try to divide the fisher community into small ineffective groups in order to weaken them and disable them for effective common action. Indiscriminate introduction of modern technology has many

pitfalls and warnings for us which we shall do well to heed. If the technology is not indigenous, or at least assimilated and appropriated by the masses, we are likely to remain the object of exploitation by multinational companies which stride the world. The fisherfolk may lose some of their robust work ethics. Dependence on non-renewable energy sources may increase to the detriment of the human and the free. The entry of the monopoly houses of India and the giant multinational companies into the field of fish culture and fish industry has to be watched with care lest they succeed in subjugating everyone to their selfish and short-term needs of maximum profit.

Frantz Fanon's warning is as valid today as it was twenty-three years ago. If Western Europe is our ideal, if our idea is to turn Asia into a new Europe or India into a copy of Britain, if going into the twenty-first century means borrowing western concepts and western technology *en masse*, "then let us leave the destiny of our countries to Europeans. They will know how to do it better than the most gifted among us. But if we want humanity to advance a step further, if we want to bring it up to a different level than that which Europe has shown it, then we must invent and we must make discoveries. If we wish to live up to our people's expectations, we must seek the response elsewhere than in Europe...For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man." (The Wretched of the Earth)

The prospects for further conscientization are good. The prospects are good for further organization, and further consolidation of the gains of past struggles. The possibilities and the promises of the situation are an invitation and a challenge to you and me and all who have the capacity to care.

# **Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation**

## **Some Reflections on the Document**

### **I**

#### **Two Instructions**

On April 5, 1986, Vatican released a second Instruction relating to Liberation Theology. It is dated 22 March 1986, and is titled *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation*. The first was issued in September, 1984, and bore the descriptive title *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation*. It was not a condemnation of liberation theology as some have tried to make it out. Its scope was more limited and precise. It was meant to draw attention to actual and possible deviations, injurious to Christian faith and life, brought about by certain forms of liberation theology which use Marxist concepts in an insufficiently critical manner. Not all forms and aspects of the theology of liberation were being charged with deviations. Nor was all use of Marxist ideas being rejected. The social encyclicals could be an example of the discerning use of more and more Marxist concepts and perspectives. But the enemies of the theology of liberation used the Vatican document and abused it too for their own purposes. The document itself easily lent itself to abuse by its dominant negativity and one-sidedness, its exaggerations and generalisations, its failure to give references with which to check its charges and its claims, by letting go its initial sobriety and allowing itself to be carried away by enthusiasm towards an attack without rhyme or reason (see sections IX and X), and by its marked inability to grasp

the new methodology used in liberation theology or to understand the particular cultural contexts and experiences of christian life from which liberation-theological reflections came to birth. In India more than due critical attention has already been bestowed on that 1984 document<sup>1</sup>.

The vehemence of that attack, emerging as it did from the headquarters of institutional catholicism, puzzled and pained theologians of liberation and the poor with whom and for whom they work out their theology. But it did more. It added muscle to the iron hands which tortured and killed christian friends of the poor in Latin America. It also created a global wave of fresh interest in liberation theology and accorded the movement a new status in the world of human search and a new place in the history of thought. The fact is that liberation theology was never a matter of indifference to anyone. The oppressed masses of the Third World welcomed it as an additional ray of hope, while the ruling and privileged classes everywhere felt threatened by its advent, and looked on it with suspicion and hostility<sup>2</sup>. The authors of the Vatican instruction did not perhaps realize that what was for them an academic exercise in their, Greco-Roman, brand of orthodoxy could spell death to hundreds of concerned and loving christians at the hands of Latin America's and East Asia's dictators and their U.S. mentors. Much less did they prove

1. See *Jeevadharma*, no. 90 (November 1985) for theological, pastoral and sociological assessments of the document: studies by C. Illickamury, M. Parinthirickal, K. M. Sebastian and F. Podimattam; *Dynamic Action* Nos 80 and 81 (July 1985); articles by S. Kappen, J. Kottukapally, K.C. Abraham and others; *Vidyajyoti* 49 (1985) studies by G. Soares-Prabhu, J. Kottukapally, and Errol D'Lima.

2. The U.S. oligarchy and their terror organization, the CIA, started surveillance of developments in the Latin American Church as early as 1969, soon after the Medellin Conference of Bishops had made its preferential option for the poor and its critique of dependence and institutionalized violence. See Nelson A. Rockefeller, *Report on the Americas*, 1969; L. Einaudi, R. Maullin, A. Stephan and M. Fleet, *Institutional Development in Latin America: Changes in the Catholic Church*, 1969; this is a study done by the Rand Corporation of California for the U.S. Department of State.

sensitive to the authenticity of a theology which was directly linked with martyrdom and the laying down of numberless lives in an attempt to secure for long-oppressed masses of people at least a minimum of life and dignity. Karl Rahner in his forward to a book on the persecution of christians in Latin America wrote:

"This book bears testimony to an authentic theology of liberation. After reading this book can the reader still reject the theology of liberation *en gross* as an exercise in modern secularism? Or must not the reader admit that the *Sitz im Leben*, the point of departure, of this theology of liberation is legitimate because it gets a footing at a spot from which leads a path that goes all the way to the end — when persons sacrifice their lives for their fellows? Does the book not reveal a theology of liberation that is a lived experience, nonviolent, not evocative of *ars gratia artis* (art for art's sake), but showing that it knows well how to shoulder responsibility for the poor and the needy?

Should we from our comfortable, bourgeois milieu defame these theologians when such a theological judgment can in practice be their death sentence? If the theology of liberation is a Third World theology, then the time has finally come for us to review our policy of exporting our scanty alms and our good advice from on high down to the Third World: we have to look up to it, learn from it."<sup>3</sup>

### Interlude

Four journalists, writing from Rome, Rio de Janeiro and Bogotá, are agreed that "if Ratzinger or the pope expected these broadsides to slow the movement of liberation theology, they miscalculated"<sup>4</sup>. Two cardinals and four

3. Karl Rahner, Forward to *Witnesses of Hope. The Persecution of Christians in Latin America* (Orbis Books, New York: 1981) p. vx

4. "Priests and Politics" by Robert B. Cullen, Theodore Stanger, Alma Cuillermeoprieto and Penny Lernoux; in *Newsweek* (April 14, 1986) p. 46

bishops from Brazil travelled to Rome to defend Leonardo Boff, one of the leading liberation theologians of Latin America who in his book *Church: Charism and Power* suggests a less authoritarian, less hierarchical, more equal, more serving church. For his exegesis and ecclesiology, Rome imposed penitential silence on Boff, thus providing additional proof for his thesis. "Ten bishops signed a letter calling his punishment a blow against human rights."<sup>5</sup> The outpouring of support for Boff from all over the world, the criticism to which the Vatican Instruction was subjected everywhere, and the ever deeper plunge into liberational work by catholic priests in the Third World may have surprised Vatican to a sense of realism. In the extraordinary synod, November-December 1985, the theology of liberation was staunchly defended by Cardinal Alciso Lorscheider of Fortalezza and Bishop Ivo Lorscheiter of Santa Maria against liberation theology's opponents in Latin America and elsewhere<sup>6</sup>. In January 1986, the General Assembly of the Conference of Religious, India, reflected on the situation in our country and committed themselves "profoundly" to the liberation of the masses, to solidarity with the poor and to liberation theology with its new methodology of first participating in the struggles of the oppressed and listening to their groans through which the Spirit speaks and the message of the Crucified Lord is heard<sup>7</sup>. They did this despite official attempts to guide them into other paths. Bishop Joseph Thumma is reported to have told the CRI assembly that liberation theologians raise social theories to the level of theology, that they substitute the faith with ideology, that they interpret the sacraments in terms of class struggle and nurse the utopian idea of a classless society etc. Archbishop Benedict Mar Gregorius told the CRI his belief that "liberation theology is losing ground even in Latin America where it originated". The CRI was wasting its time discussing some-

5. *Ibid.*

6. *The Examiner*, April 5, 1986.

7. See the statement of the CRI in this number of the *Jeevadharma* together with a meditation on it by S. Rayan

thing passé. While for Bishop Thumma social workers were bereft of a supernatural sense of proportion, Mar Gregorios was sure that liberation theologians in Kerala were bent on destroying the "church". The Archbishop proceeded then to co-opt liberation theology for the rich by defining it as a means to change the hearts where oppression originates<sup>8</sup>!

In March 13-15, 1986, the pope met twenty one Brazilian bishops to discuss church activities in their country. In his opening talk he said to them: "It would be unrealistic to suppose that in the midst of the intense dialogue of these days the red-hot question of "liberation theology" would not arise. It is not the theme of these days, but neither would it be realistic to try to avoid it."

So liberation theology was not quite losing ground after all! It was a "red-hot" question, and not quite passé. And discussing it (*pace* Mar Gregorios) the pope was not wasting his time. The pope told the bishops that the 1984 instruction "confirmed that a theological reflection on liberation can and must exist which is based on solid doctrinal elements... The church considers it its duty to proceed with this reflections, to update it and to deepen it..., thanks to which it seeks to give a response also to the grave questions, related to social justice.. peace and disarmament, liberty, the fundamental rights of the human person... When purified of elements which can adulterate it,... this theology of liberation is not only orthodox but also necessary."<sup>9</sup>

That proviso, "when purified of elements which can adulterate it", is important and vital. It applies to the theology of liberation, and to all theology and spirituality and religions and political life, as well as to food and medicine and philosophies and sciences.

In India *The Examiner* commented in a leading article with the title, "A Red-Hot issue". "Those who thought that liberation theology was finished and would be condemned sooner than later are in for a big surprise.

8. *SAR News*, January 12-15, 1986; and February 1, 1986.

9. *Origins* 15 / 42, (April 3, 1986) p. 684.

Liberation theology is not only (not) dead, but it is a "red-hot issue" and a necessary part of the church's social thought."<sup>10</sup>

### The new document

The *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation* (CFL) is not a theology of liberation. It does not work out a theology, but indicates the "principal theoretical and practical aspects" of the theme of freedom and liberation which is at the heart of the Gospel message. It affirms the necessity of such a theology, "a theology of freedom and liberation which faithfully echoes Mary's *Magnificat* preserved in the Church's memory is something needed by the times in which we are living" (no.98).

Why it is a necessity now and was not earlier since the *Magnificat* was always there and the theme of freedom-liberation always lay at the heart of the Gospel, is not made clear. To make that clear a different, a historical approach would be required. More about that later. *The Examiner* thinks that with the publication of this document, "liberation theology and the whole movement inspired by it comes into its own". The *Newsweek* writers suggest that the new document was issued as Vatican saw the growing popularity of liberation theology in the Third World where much of the flock is poor and downtrodden, bishops and priests are deciding (as in the Philippines, in Haiti, in Taiwan, in South Korea, in Brazil, in Nicaragua, in Chile) that they cannot be true to their faith without taking the side of the oppressed. "If the Third Worlders are casting off their chains, Vatican does not want to be left behind", said a churchman in Rome. "This", said another, "is a sign of the Vatican applying Realpolitik."<sup>11</sup>

The warnings of the 1984 documents against polluting catholicism with concepts borrowed from Marxism are not revoked; they remain in force. But the new document has a new accent; its emphasis is different from that of the first instruction. In many areas of concern and interpretation

10. *The Examiner*, April 5, 1986.

11. *Newsweek*, pp 44, 45.

Vatican finds itself in agreement with theologians of liberation. Thomas Seitzrich, writing in *Publik Forum*, feels that "the new Vatican instruction is a victory for those who speak for the church of the poor in Latin America. The victory is clear and unequivocal. In particular the bishops around Cardinal Arns of São Paulo, who are committed to the theology of liberation, have been able, in the course of the last one year, to exert influence on the Congregation in Rome"<sup>12</sup>. It seems that after the appearance of the first instruction, Brazilian Cardinals Aloisio Lorscheider and Evaristo Arns expressly requested Vatican that in the preparation of the second document, theologians from the world church representing all schools of thought, including Latin American Bishops and theologians of liberation should be taken into confidence<sup>13</sup>. Seitzrich detects the influence of Latin American thinking in what is distinctive in the new document. Latin American handwriting and liberation-theological inspiration are unmistakable in the central chapter three, which is a biblical-theological journey through the Old and New Testaments from the Exodus to the Magnificat. Here Rome is making its own the perspective from which liberation theologians view bible history, and interpret the reality of the exploited South. This fact, observes Seitzrich, is of great importance. "Liberation theology is thereby revalued, and placed on the level of the church's official teaching. "That means there has been a process of learning on the part of Vatican . Ratzinger, while presenting the new document, declared that Rome too was anxious to learn from the theology of liberation. The learning process finds expression in the core statements of the document. Seitzrich speaks of Rome's conversion.

That might explain the sense of relief with which the basic ecclesial communities and the bishops committed to the theology of liberation welcomed the new document.

12. Thomas Seitzrich, Umkehr in Rom ? in: *Publik Form* 15 / 9 (25 April, 1986) pp 21-23.

13. Cf. G. Burchardt, Rom Urteilt zu undefiniert. Etappen eines noch ungelösten Konflikts, in: *Herderkorrespondenz* 35 (1984) p. 485.

According to Celso Pedro da Silva, General Secretary to Brazil's Bishop's Conference, the church in Brazil now feels heartened in its option for the poor. The critics of liberation theology will now have to rethink their position. Leonardo Boff points out that through the new document liberation theology has been awarded "a new universal dimension" embracing the world church. Gustavo Gutierrez describes the document as positive; it "marks the end of an era"; it brings "a period of painful debates" to a close; and it "relaunches" the movement. Are these conclusions too optimistic and too premature<sup>14</sup>?

### Heart of the matter

On what basis does this positive evaluation of the document rest? On the following four features, I guess: an awareness of the situation of poverty, oppression, injustice; acknowledgement of its structural character and the need for structural change; the call to action; and lastly the view of the bible as a story of liberation and of God as liberator.

(a) *The situation:* The document introduces the church as one who "contemplates the tragedies affecting the world", and while doing so "reflects on the meaning of liberation and true freedom" (no.3). The ambiguity of technology which could be a force for liberation or for oppression, is recognized. "The new technological power is linked to economic power and leads to a concentration of it." The result is new forms of inequality and relationships of dependence within nations and between nations (no. 12). There are now totalitarian systems, fresh forms of tyranny, acts of genocide, practice of terrorism, control of the innermost life, and threat of total destruction. Relationship of inequality and oppression between the powerful and the powerless is emphasised, and "the weight of age-old poverty" is remembered (nos. 14-17). "The situation of the poor is a situation of injustice... Injustice to the little ones and the poor is a grave sin" (no. 46). Progress

14. Cf *Newsweek*, p. 44; *Publik Forum* [p. 21]; *The Examiner*, April 19, 1986.

of some is at present an obstacle to the development of others, and a pretext for their enslavement (no. 90). "Unjust inequalities in the possession and use of material goods is accompanied and aggravated by similarly unjust inequalities in the opportunity for culture." (no. 92) "Keeping people on the margins of cultural, social and political life constitutes in many nations one of the most glaring injustices of our times." (no. 95) Thus the awareness of the situation is most marked towards the beginning of the document and towards its end. There are however stray references in between to oppression (no. 57); to situations of sin and injustice and to "the immense load of suffering borne by all the generations" (no. 60); and to "forms of deviation, slavery and oppression of which people are victims" (65). Poverty is seen as "an evil from which human beings must be freed as completely as possible" (no. 67). Inequality is given very particular attention: inequality in wealth, power and culture establishes relationships of dependence and dominance. Such a situation is oppressive, unjust.

(b) *Structural evil:* Man, having become his own centre, "makes his own contribution to the creation of those very structures of exploitation and slavery which he claims to condemn" (no. 42). By denying God, "man disturbs his own order and interior balance and also those of society and even of visible creation" (no. 38). Situations of sin and injustice are to be overcome (no. 60). The church does not hesitate to condemn situations of life which are injurious to man's dignity and freedom. Though necessary in themselves, structures "often tend to become fixed and fossilized as mechanisms relatively independent of the human will, thereby paralysing or distorting social development and causing injustice. "One can therefore speak of structures marked by sin." (no. 74)

(c) *Call to action:* Christians who "have not failed to fight" for workers' rights or to commit their lives to liberation from oppression are remembered with appreciation (nos. 13, 57). At one point freedom is defined in terms of doing – doing good (no. 26). The christian community is

given strength "to act resolutely and effectively in the service of love, justice and peace" (no. 43). The poor of Yahweh fight against injustice (no. 47). The experience of the saints and the example of christians who have "committed their powers and their lives to liberation from every form of oppression" must be "an incentive and a beacon for liberating undertakings that are needed today" (no. 57) The Church therefore "calls man and societies to overcome situations of sin and injustice and to establish the conditions for true freedom" (no.60). And the Gospel Beatitudes urgently demand and keep in right perspective "the commitment necessary in temporal tasks of service to neighbour and the human community" (no. 62). The summons issued here has more than relief services and inner conversion in view. It aims at transformation of structures as well. The recognized priority of the person, of personal freedom and conversion of heart, "in no way eliminates the need for unjust structures to be changed". Changing them is man's responsibility. "It is therefore perfectly legitimate that those who suffer oppression from the part of the wealthy or the politically powerful should take action, through morally licit means, in order to secure structures and institutions in which their rights will be truly respected... It is necessary to work simultaneously for the conversion of hearts and for the improvement of structures." (nos. 74,75) The Church encourages the creation of associations like trade unions which fight for the rights of workers and for social justice (no. 77). Indeed, "situations of grave injustice require the courage to make far-reaching reforms and to suppress unjustifiable privileges." The fight against injustice must have for its goal the establishment of "a new social and political order in conformity with the demands of justice" (no. 78). The Instruction goes further and revives a church tradition which holds that in extreme cases, to put an end to an obvious and prolonged tyranny which is gravely damaging the fundamental rights of individuals and the common good, recourse may be had to armed struggle as a last resort. The transformations envisioned are not only economic and political; radical cultural transformation too is "essential"

for solving the grave problems which must be faced by the age in which we live" (no. 82).

(d) *Bible as history of liberation:* A fourth feature of the instruction which merits positive appreciation is the attempt to trace in the Bible the story of God's liberating action. In the Exodus from Egypt "God rescues his people from hard economic, political and cultural slavery". The event has a meaning "which is both religious and political". It is this liberating action of Yahweh that "serves as model and reference for all others" (no. 44). In the constitution of the people of Israel with the Covenant and the law and the special care for the rights of the poor, "there already exist the ideal and the outline of a society centred upon worship of the Lord and based upon justice and law inspired by love" (no. 45). But Covenant and communion with God are contradicted and destroyed by "the situation of the poor" which is a situation of injustice. "The prophets make themselves God's spokesmen for the poor", vigorously condemn injustice done to the little ones, present Yahweh as the refuge of the oppressed, and announce the coming Messiah as their defender (no. 46). The Old Testament history of the poor of Yahweh who suffer for their sins, and trust in Yahweh, and hope for deliverance comes to its culmination in Mary who sings of the coming liberation (nos. 47-48). And Mary's Son, Jesus, brought the good news of the Kingdom to the poor, made himself poor, wished to be recognized in the poor, and by the power of his Paschal Mystery set us free (nos. 50-53). In his commandment of love he brings together God and neighbour, enemies and friends, mercy and justice, and all social groups beyond all antagonisms. And through liberating undertaking His Holy Spirit leads all towards the fullness of freedom in eternal happiness (nos. 53-59). The Instruction holds that the promise of "a finally perfect justice" for all in the coming Kingdom "directly concerns our life in this world" (no. 60).

That sounds good and hope-giving. The summary has been admittedly selective. We were attempting a review of what is positive from liberation theological perspec-

tive. But other perspectives are found adjacent and inter-spread. Is the document being dialectical or merely ambiguous? Side by side with the call to action are there not currents of passivity as well? And beneath the historical concern is not a controlling inwardness and other-worldliness operative? Does not the abstract character of concepts and approaches overshadow the question of historical justice and freedom? Will that explain why the description of the historical reality of poverty, hunger, oppression, disease and suffering is so fragmentary, meagre and cold? Why do the bourgeois freedoms loom large while the hunger of the people, the death of children, the captivity of numberless women, and the groans of the tortured and the bonded are given scant attention? Reservations and distinctions become necessary when the text is read carefully and critically. Questions may rise about the methodology used, the audience or cultural milieu addressed, the social analysis implied, the claims made for the church, the hermeneutics employed and the way of posing the problem of sin, freedom and liberation. To some of these points we wish to speak.

## II

### In the light of each other

We are told that between the two Instructions of 1984 and 1986 there exists an organic relation and that "they are to be read in the light of each other" (1-2). In that case the two could have been issued together; that is, they could have formed one integrated document. Or, at least, the more positive of the two could have been brought out first. Then the warnings, the unreferenced charges and the negative judgments of Instruction One could have found themselves set in proper context, and their misuse for anti-liberation propaganda by well-to-do and well-established opponents of liberation could have been prevented in part. Those who passionately misused Instruction One are now not likely to register the nuances of the present document.

Where indeed was the hurry to rush with a one-sided condemnatory document instead of taking time to produce a solid, balanced critical study? Methodologically it was ill-advised to come out with a strongly-worded negative document on a movement still in process of evolving, adjusting itself, criticising itself and finding its feet; and which at the same time is central to the Faith, and is delicate and complex due to its link with political, economic and cultural realities. We have a right to expect those who gave Instruction One extra-ordinary publicity such as they never gave to weighty Council documents or Papal letters, like *The Church in the Modern World*, or *The Development of Peoples*, or *Peace on Earth*, or *Justive in the World*, to give to this document at least equal attention. This may be a time of testing when "the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare" (Lk 2:35).

### **Local application**

The Instruction only claims to indicate the "principal theoretical and practical aspects" of the theme of freedom and liberation. Their application to different local situations is a task that falls to the local churches (no. 2). Here the document is making clear that its methodology is traditional, scholastic, deductive. It starts from principles, theories and generalities. Is the instruction hereby dissociating itself from the historical approach which is characteristic of liberation theology? The theology of liberation claims to have effected an epistemological break. It starts from concrete commitment and practice in concrete situations. It is born of spiritual-theological experience of God who is encountered in the poor. It is the work not of isolated and daring individuals, but the totality of the church in any given place. C. K. Chesterton used to say: If you want to make a thing real, make it local. Liberation theology is real because it is local. It is rooted in the local people's experience of oppression and of the God who summons and enables the oppressed to liberative action. The Roman instruction is asking the local churches to take their theory from a distant centre and apply it to themselves. But the local churches have their own theory born of their own

reflection on their own experience of freedom and unfreedom, oppression and struggle against oppression, their own experience of praxis of liberation. It is there they encounter God who is truly encountered in concrete history.

In the Instruction's scheme of things the local church's concrete reality seems to be ignored and bypassed — which precisely is what oppressive power does. It is regrettable that such a perspective should frame Christian reflection on freedom and liberation. The more so since each person and each local community is a centre of free decision of faith, and live in a Church "in which every one is a first-born son" or daughter (Heb:12:23). Christian reflection on freedom and liberation should start with our actual, local experience of it, our own Christian understanding of it, and our endeavours in its behalf. It should begin from our commitment and involvement, our practice of freedom within our faith-life. And not from a (borrowed) theme or theory or general principle. The "doing" of the word has primacy (Mt 7:21-27; 21:28-32; 25:31-46; Mk 3:31-35; Lk 10:29-37; Jn 13:17, 34-35; 14:21-24; 1 Jn 3:16-19). The method of the Fourth Gospel is to posit a Sign first which is 'flesh' and 'work', and then to unlock its meaning and message through reflection and discourse. We in the Third World may not forget that our own enslavement and exploitation was carried out by men abounding in religious words and in theories about freedom, salvation and dignity. But freedom is not a theory; it is a lived experience of a particular kind of relationship. Paragraph 70 has a positive word about "theological reflection developed from a particular experience". That is the point to start from.

### **As the church contemplates**

The deductive approach of the instruction tallies with a certain conception of the church. "...as she contemplates the tragedies affecting the world, she reflects on the meaning of liberation and true freedom."(no. 3) The description is true perhaps of the churches of the First World. They can contemplate from a distance the tragedies occurring over and there..." The Third World, however, and its churches are interior to the tragedy. They are part

of it. And the tragedy is part of them and their history. They can only contemplate it by being it, and struggling against its destructiveness. For them to reflect on the meaning of liberation and freedom is not to elaborate an immaculate theory but to participate in a struggle, as loving as possible, against forces of death and despair.

Elsewhere the Instruction presents the church as more than a detached contemplative. The church makes her own the people's aspirations for freedom (no. 1); she voices support for the cause of workers (no. 13); she speaks for the promotion of justice, and condemns slavery and oppression (nos. 64, 65, 74); the laity (not the pastors) act directly, "on their own initiative", "in the political construction and organization of social life" (no. 80). The church is "sensitive to the anxieties of our age" (no. 96). The decisive question always is: Out of what experience of liberational struggles and services is the church (the laity, the pastors, the curia, the local church, the magisterium) speaking? From within what historical commitment is the church, any church, reflecting? If the reflection is on the theme of freedom, we may get a gnosis of freedom; if it is on an inner "spiritual struggle" (no. 53), its contributions and claims will be similar to those made by all the religions and ideologies. For the biblical tradition, however, the spiritual is the historical that participates in and contributes to the coming of the Reign of God, and to the growth of love and the enhancement of humanness. The church can make a contribution to liberation and to a theology of liberation in the measure in which it is a participating church, with an experience in its very spirit and flesh of concrete situations as well as an experience of the victims' No to death in all its forms. Only then can the church name the problem. One cannot but wish that the Instruction reflected a little more concretely, humanly and warmly.

The problematic itself is different from the abstract approach of the Instruction. Surely it is not possible to include such pictures in an instruction meant for a world church; there would be no end. That defence really means that instructions meant for a world church will of necessity

be so general and flat as to serve little purpose or none. With Chesterton let us repeat, if we wish to make a thing real, let us make it local.

### The truth that liberates

We are still in the introductory section, busy with aspects of the Instruction's methodology. All theological reflection and all pastoral decision in this area of freedom and liberation must, says the text, be guided and lighted up by Jesus' words, "The truth will make you free" (no. 3; Jn 8:32). The word of Jesus is, of course, inseparable from his deed, life and person. Still, a less theoretical and more historical-biblical sensitivity would have pointed to the practice of Jesus rather than to his words as light and guide in this as in other areas. What was most challenging and unsettling was Jesus' practice; it was his liberational practice that finally cost him his young life. From the way his words are quoted in the Instruction it looks as if an abstract principle were to be the guide and light. But if the words are placed back in their context and the saying of Jesus is cited in full, we shall find ourselves arguing from a liberation-theology perspective. This is what Jesus said: "If you make my word your home you will indeed be my disciples and you will learn the truth and the truth will make you free." Freedom is bound up with the learning (the knowing, the experiencing) of the truth; and learning the truth is bound up with discipleship; discipleship is defined in terms of dwelling in Jesus' word or living in accordance with his message, example and spirit. Freedom is ultimately rooted in and consists of practice which continues the practice of Jesus. In effect this would mean love for neighbour, defence of the poor, standing up for justice and for the dignity of all women and men even when that would entail the risking of life. But according to Jesus life is for risking and laying down so that people may have life as happy, creative and complete as possible.

The Instruction affirms that the Church "possesses the truth regarding the Father and his love for us, and also the truth concerning man and his freedom" (no. 3). There is truth in this claim, and yet the claim as here ex-

pressed is astonishing. Limitations of the truth we possess are, hopefully, not denied. But an awareness of them is not manifest, nor is a great sense of the awesome mystery of the Father and his love for us, and of the endless questions we have about him and us and our freedom in evidence. Christian and Indian spiritual sensitivity would rather seek to convey the greatness and mystery of the Divine as well as the enigma of the Human by suggesting that the truth (of God and man) possesses us; or, even, that the truth is endlessly toiling to take hold of us and fashion us into something of itself. It is through practice of love and freedom in response to God's summons, and through struggles against indignity and oppression and action against the historical agents of these that we become transformed, bit by bit, into truer and truer human beings. It is thus God moulds us day by day into ever more authentic images of himself, enabling us to be, and to know, and to experience the truth, and grow in freedom. Our daily struggles against all that is untrue and anti-human make us daily freer and freer. Such sparks do and must grow and link up and leap to a great and vast flame which will melt away fetters and burn down prisons and usher in finally God's reign of freedom. It is a long struggle; it is a long way to freedom.

### III

#### Interpreting Scripture

That brings us to another interesting aspect of the Instruction's methodology, namely, the way it uses and interprets scripture. The use of John 8:32 is only one of several cases we cannot really go along with. Instruction One part X is a critique of a New Hermeneutics allegedly used by theologies of liberation. One complaint is that the Exodus and the Magnificat are given a political interpretation. Or, "the mistake is not in bringing attention to a political dimension of the reading of scripture, but in making this one dimension the principal or exclusive component of it" (X.5). Cardinal Retzinger's Office seems to settle a score in the new Instruction by passing in silence over the political dimension of sacred texts. There are other reservations too to mention.

(a) *Politics and cult:* In Instruction Two the political meaning of Exodus is acknowledged along with its religious meaning. That the purpose of the Exodus liberation was "the Covenant cult celebrated on Mount Sinai" is no longer said so explicitly as in the 1984 Instruction (IV. 3). But the idea is not wholly given up. God rescues the people "in order to make them a kingdom of priests". "God wishes to be adored by a people who are free." (no. 44) Historical criticism would rightly raise the question whether at the time of struggling out of Egypt into freedom Israel had any positive idea and appreciation of kingdoms and priesthoods. As for adoration, why was God so particular about the political freedom of his worshippers since according to Instruction One "the New Testament does not require some change in the political and social condition as a prerequisite for entrance into this (radical) freedom" (IV. 13)? Why was such change required in the Old Testament? Or is it that God's cultic tastes altered as time passed and politically he became less radical and made salvation less historical, less human, less integral and whole? The freedom required for "adoration" is the inner freedom which, according to the Instruction is always there (nos. 21, 31). But if "adoration" means something more than interior Godward attitudes with a minimum of bodily expressions, if it includes the social construction of a just and fraternal world, then the political becomes essential not only as precondition but as constitutive part of worship in history of the God of history. The political is not dispensable in the New Testament times of the Kingdom's definitive inbreak. The Instruction fails also to understand that justice and freedom for human beings are values without honouring which all cult becomes abomination and nonsense. Cult without justice is rejected by Yahweh; while justice is always welcome, cult or no cult. In fact justice is the basic form of faith and worship; in it consists the knowledge of the Lord (Jer 22:16). What has happened is that an (unbiblical?) theology of priestly cult dear to many has been superimposed on original biblical perspectives.

(b) *Magnificat:* It is given central importance (nos. 48, 97, 100). In it Mary is said to be proclaiming the coming of

the Messiah and praising the Lord who is preparing to set his people free. The Lukan narrative is taken as it stands with no reference to the historical fact that in this song the early church is celebrating the liberation already accomplished by God in Jesus of Nazareth. The song is seen as a hymn of praise to the divine mercy, full of salvific and ethical treasures including the power to transform. No hint however of its clear and loud political overtones, not a word about the lines expressive of God's subversive intervention: He has pulled down the princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things, the rich sent empty away. Why this silence? It could hardly be an oversight; the same designed silence is heard in all the relatively lengthy comments on the hymn. The concluding section points to a plan of salvation unfolding in the Virgin of the Magnificat. The task of the theologian is to help the people to express its faith and translate it into life through a meditation on this plan. The theologian of liberation should faithfully echo Mary's Magnificat, and not misdirect the energies of popular piety "towards a purely earthly plan of liberation" (no. 98). Who is or has been doing this "criminal" thing, the Instruction is unable or unwilling to tell us. Who is reducing the meaning of the Exodus or the Magnificat to purely political dimensions is never disclosed. But the strategy is clear. For centuries a spiritual reductionism has been practised. Salvation and liberation were purely, even exclusively (the Instruction now says primarily) interior, other-worldly and individualistic. Slavery, imperialist domination, colonial exploitation etc. need not bother the oppressed! This spiritual reductionism was conveniently used to manipulate our conscience and keep us in subjection and exploit us to the utmost. Though it made nonsense of bible history and the ministry of Jesus, such reductionism was never officially challenged, never condemned as criminal, never rejected as unorthodox.

(c) Paul is cited as witness to the idolatries and aberrations of the pagan world's "culpable ignorance of God" (no.39; Rom 1:18-32). But why only this passage and the case of 'pagans'? What outlook prevents the Instruction from referring to Romans 2 where Paul finds the Jews behaving

no differently? and from extending the survey to modern times and to Christians whom Asia and Africa have come to know as behaving no differently either? Or, on the other hand, why not refer also to such passages in the same context as convey a positive appreciation of 'the pagans' (Ro 2:12-16)? I enter these remarks to point to two factors which have to be kept in mind in reading this Instruction: one, the horizon and vision of the document is narrow and narrowly western; two, even in the use of scriptures a selectivity is operative, the fairness of which is not so obvious.

(d) The ministry of Jesus is briefly referred to in terms of solidarity with the poor, services of healing and feeding and especially of freeing from sin (nos. 50-53, 66-67). The emphasis here as elsewhere is on liberation from sin understood as separation from God, or as wanting to be God, and as the source of all division and oppression (nos. 37-42).

(i) To illustrate sin as separation from God and abuse of freedom the myth in Genesis 3 is cited, not the historical legend in Gen 4 where the first sin in its historical concreteness is depicted. Sin is the killing of the brother and the oppression of the weak, the denial of life to the other, the destruction of God's live image on this earth. (ii) Our vocation to be like God is mentioned in passing (no.37) but the wealth of scriptural teaching on this is not utilized in order to view sin in a new way (cf Mt 5:43-48; Jn 10:31-36; 1 Jn 3:2). (iii) His healing ministry never places repentance as a precondition. It is conditioned rather on trust. This is a tradition dating from the Exodus and the days of the prophets. Suffering people may confess their sins, but they are not humiliated as sinners nor penitence demanded before deliverance is offered. In John 3 Jesus refuses to link suffering with personal sin (iv). Is it true then to say that "it is in their relationship to sin that scripture regards all the different calamities which oppress man in his personal and social existence"? (no. 38) It must at least be clear that the calamity which befell Abel and the oppression Israel endured in Egypt are not attributed to their sin but to oppression by others. In every age the poor have suffered because of the Cains and Pharaohs of the day. Much of present day misery and constraints on life in Asia, Africa and Latin America are traceable to what European Christians have done to these continents since the 16th century and continue to do today through the mechanisms and organs of Transnational Capitalism. It is true that suffering has relation to sin; but whose sin? Neglect to clarify this point adds to the ambiguity of the Instruction and points to its ideological bias.

All this is to show that the particular slant of theological thought that marks this Instruction is not the only one possible, nor perhaps the best founded, for christians who want to be faithful to God and his people, to scriptures and traditions, and the experience of the Spirit's fellowship.

## IV

### **Analysis**

The 1984 Instruction rejected Marxist class analysis as unacceptable. We had expected a different analysis, sociologically valid and theologically acceptable, to be employed in the new document. But there is no socio-political-cultural analysis at all. The nearest to one is a brief attempt to trace links between technological power, economic power, inequality and relationships of dependence (no. 12). There is instead a scholastic theological analysis which is elementary and historically debatable. We are told that "poverty is the result and consequence of people's (?) sin (?) and natural frailty" (no. 67). We are assured that "in its various forms...human misery is the obvious sign of the natural condition of weakness in which man finds himself since original sin..." (no. 68) (i) Were this really so we would expect to find far less misery and poverty among those, and authored by those, whom Christ "has set free", after he "has taken away the sin of the world" (no. 51, 52). To them "the Holy Spirit has restored the capacity which sin had taken away"; they are therefore "set free from disordered self-love which is the source of contempt of neighbour and of human relationship based on domination" (no. 53). However, from historical experience we know that 'the saved people' do not look much more saved than the rest; and most of today's major problems like systematic oppression and deep exploitation, monstrous economic imbalances arrogant domination, nuclear arms race and threat of total destruction are the work of those "who have been set free from the bondage and weakness of original sin"! (ii) It should be of comfort to the rich First World to know from official religion that Third World misery and poverty are due to Third World sin. Four to five centuries of oppression can be quietly buried in oblivion. (iii) It may be equally comfortable to realise that if poverty is "natural" in the context of original sin, it cannot be eliminated. All that we need to do then is to alleviate some of its pain, organize charity, promote reforms and ridicule revolution as mystical and illusory (nos. 68, 78), and advocate patient waiting (50, 51), and develop a theology of suffering (51), and seek to convince the poor, but rarely

the rich, that "man is worth more for what he is than for what he has" (68), though the correct position, as spelled out by Paul VI in *Populorum Progressio* is that all should have more in order to do more so as to be (become) more. For it is false to drive a wedge between having, doing and being-becoming. (iv) Poverty is traced back to natural frailty if not to human sin (nos. 67-68). Its cause is backwardness and the remedy is provided by science and technology. Given these "a life of dignity with freedom from poverty can be reasonably envisaged for mankind" ((nos. 7-9). Why then is it that poverty is not eliminated and dignity secured for all? The structure of the material basis of our existence, our fundamental relations of production, work, distribution and consumption and the allocation of power have a great deal to do with the making and the unmaking of poverty and misery, arms-racing and war-mongering. Elements of an analysis along these lines are found scattered in the Instruction (nos. 8, 12, 16, 17) where the theme of inequality is touched on in relation to dependence, oppression and freedom. But the elements are not developed nor consistently pursued, for fear of having to make a class analysis or acknowledge a debt to Karl Marx? The fundamental weakness and ambiguity of the document is its failure to analyse global capitalism which is the dominant economic system and cultural pattern today.

### **Activity/passivity**

We have seen that the Instruction is a clear summons to act resolutely (nos. 43, 75), to fight for justice and the defence of rights (nos. 77, 78), and create structures in which freedom can be more fully exercised. Even armed struggle is approved in special cases as a last resort (no. 79). Despite the call to action the Instruction has a strong undercurrent of passivity. If the two interact critically and creatively much good could come of it. But the passivity communicated could also obstruct the march forward, and prove, as in the past, to be one more devise for exploitation in the hands of the privileged.

There is no suggestion that by liberational endeavours we complete in ourselves what is lacking in the re-

surrection and glorification of Christ (no. 51). There is no invitation to join God where he opens prisons, smashes fetters, pulls down the mighty from their thrones and lifts up the lowly. This is a spirituality which, while it is valuable and precious, has also been a favorite of colonialists and dominators, TNCs, generals and racists.

In the passive spirituality evil is hubris, the intrusion of man into the realm of the divine (cf. no. 37). Its primordial Greek symbol is Prometheus. Hence the accent on submission and the imposition of silence. While there is truth in this, there is another sin which the bible underscores. And that is *inertia*, non-involvement, passivity, the refusal to participate in God's liberating action. To be uninterested in God's historical project and to be uncommitted is to be an atheist.

### The addressee

In the opening chapters and in some way throughout the Instruction what is being addressed is the reality and the history of the West. Significant African and Asian experiences and history are not considered. Is it that the authors of the document were honest enough to acknowledge their unfamiliarity with reality and their consequent lack of competence to deal with it? or is it that we, Africans and Asians are not supposed to have a history and experience of our own? or that our experience cannot be really different from that of the West? or that ours is not worth considering?

We know we have a history of freedom, and a history of struggles to be ourselves and masters of our destiny which God holds in our hands. We know we shall have to do our own reflection on them. So the Instruction does not really speak to us of the Third World. Still we thought it good to listen to what they are saying to themselves, but only as we have time after time said to ourselves what has to be said about our own liberation. There are many more things in the Roman Instruction to respond to, but this should suffice for the moment.